Laxtunich Lintels 1 to 4

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A Universe in a Maya Lintel I: The Lamb's Journey and the "Lost City"

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by **Andrew Scherer** (Brown U), **Charles Golden** (Brandeis U), **Stephen Houston**(Brown U), and **James Doyle** (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The most complex images often require multiple sets of eyes (and minds) to probe their creation, meaning, and afterlives. Lavished with care at their making, they may, if excavated or looted, embark on journeys to far times and places, beyond any possible imagining by the patrons who commissioned them. This four-part series - on discovery (Maya Lintel I), Classic-era history, (Maya Lintel II); color use, (Maya Lintel III; and cosmology (Maya Lintel IV) – explores an enigma in Maya archaeology: the two lintels, notable for their preservation and elaborate iconography, seen and photographed by, Dana Lamb, in 1950 (Lamb and Lamb 1951:332). The find was of sufficient interest to appear in Ian Graham's memoir (Graham 2010:462–467), which commented tartly on Lamb's elastic, even tenuous relation to fact: "[t]he tale [of their discovery] is, of course, ridiculous" (Graham 2010:463). Lamb compounded that absurdity with the map emblazoned on the endpapers of his book (Figure 1). The "Lost City Area" covers half of Peten, Guatemala, the northernmost slivers of the departments of Huehuetenango, Quiche, and the Alta Verapaz, and, with expansive generosity—why not throw them in too?—parts of Campeche, Chiapas, and Tabasco in Mexico.

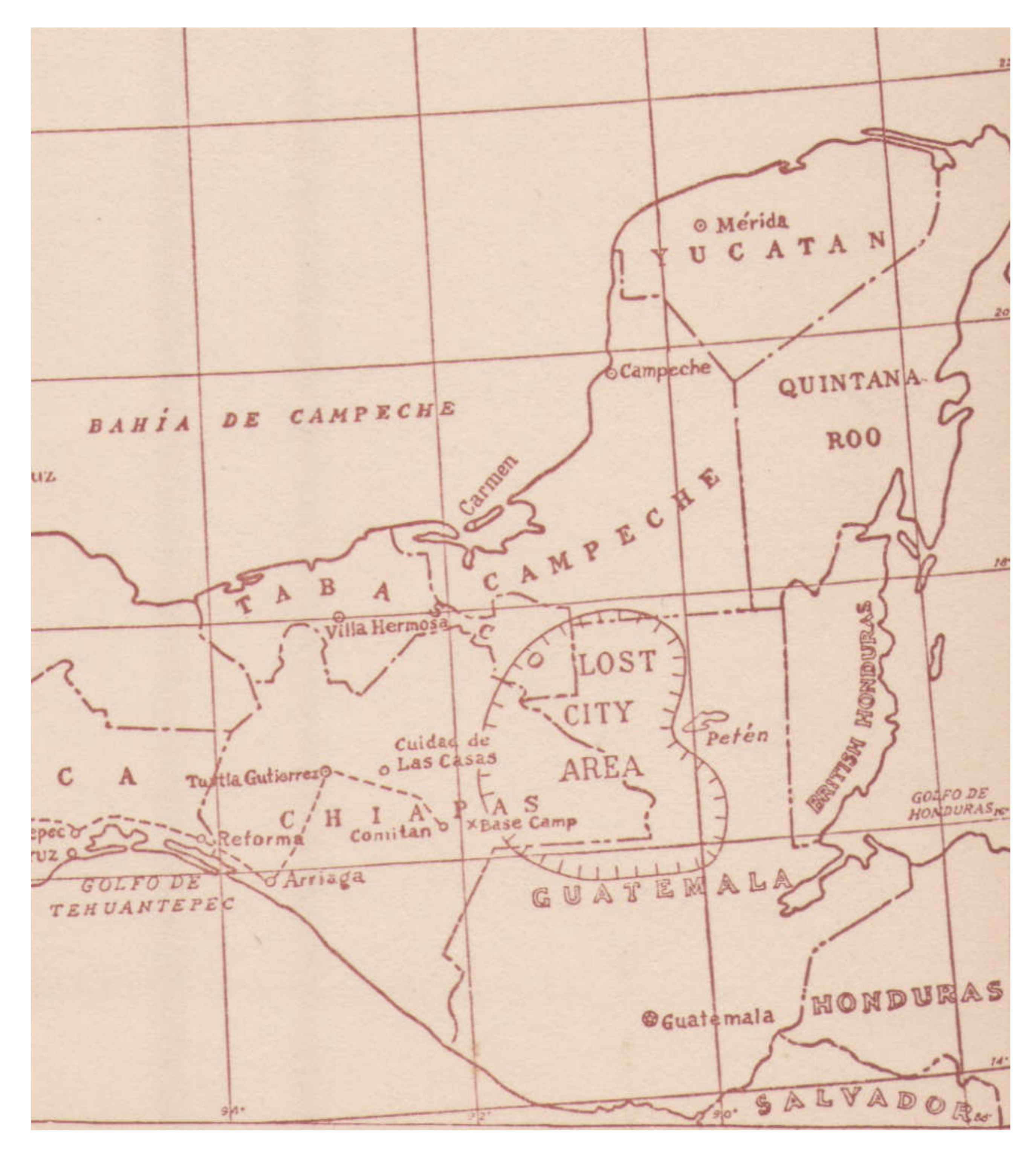


Figure 1*. The "Lost City Area" (Lamb and Lamb 1951:front endpaper).*

Lamb's photographs, which had been shared with Gordon Ekholm at the American Museum of Natural History, give some savor of the lintels and their condition at the time of discovery (Figures 2 to 4). The rough, load-bearing sections above and below the images (where such sections can be seen) make it certain that the carvings spanned doorways. They were lintels, not wall panels.



Figure 2. *Laxtunich Lintel 4, top section, April 1950; the lintel has been lifted from a face-down position, its load-bearing surface still intact to the left (American Museum of Natural History).*



Figure 3. *Dana Lamb with Laxtunich Lintel 4 Bottom, 1950 (American Museum of Natural History).*



***Figure 4**. Laxtunich Lintel 3, top section, April 1950; note the still intact, load-bearing portion to lower right and stacked stones from a collapsed vault or door jamb to upper right (courtesy American Museum of Natural History).*

The later existence of these sculptures is tragic. They were sawn up, thinned to reduce their weight—the residue most likely discarded in situ—and taken by mule or tumpline from Lamb's "Lost City," which he had decided to call Laxtunich, '"*Lasch-Tu-Nich'* (phonetic spelling), the Place of Carved Stones" (Lamb and Lamb 1951:332; presumably, the neologism derived, after some shredding of phonology, from Lacandon *ra'ch*, "scratch" [Hofling 2014:285–286]; cf. Ch'orti' *lajchi*, "scratch" [Hull 2016:241]).

Their illicit journey from Laxtunich is murky at best. According to Graham (2010:453), a guard at Yaxchilan, Mexico, "had caught sight [in about 1963] of men with mules appearing out of the bush on the opposite [Guatemalan] bank of the river…The men then unloaded the mules' cargo of sculptured stone panels, concealed them under jungle trash, and departed…the panels remained there for several days before men

returned with a boat to take them.” Scholars have long known that the lintels contain clues to their original, general location. The presence of the Yaxchilan Emblem, a supreme title of rulers, and depictions of a later king of that kingdom, Chelew Chan K’inich, places them firmly in some part of Yaxchilan territory (Zender et al. 2016:36).

Were the “panels” seen by the guard from Yaxchilan or were they another set of carvings from Guatemalan territory? What Graham can confirm is that the lintels resurfaced in the collection of the late William P. Palmer III of Falmouth, Maine, or rather, after his death, within a storage facility in Zurich, Switzerland (Graham 2010:465–466). Grainy photographs show them trimmed of their butts and backs, with an occasional scale marked by a European-style, cross-barred “7” (Mayer 1984:98–99, pls. 203, 204). Palmer, who died in 1982, aged 49, was an active collector from about 1958 to 1973 (Palmer as collector). A graduate of the University of Maine, Palmer donated a trove of Mesoamerican material to the Hudson Museum at that institution (Palmer Hudson). [Note 1] The lintels (Laxtunich Lintel 3 and Laxtunich Lintel 4) clearly ended up elsewhere. Graham (2010:515n3) believes that Panama was a way-station on their eventual path to Europe, a circuitous route designed “to obscure their source” and, presumably, to facilitate their shipment to buyers abroad. According to Graham, a possible seller might have been the Mexican economist, collector, and dealer, Dr. Josué Sáenz, from whom Palmer bought a number of pieces. At that time, in the lead-up to the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, Sáenz was the President of the Mexican Olympic Committee, a highly visible position (Witherspoon 2008). He might have had fears of confiscation, electing instead to liquidate some of his investments in Pre-Columbian art. We cannot know but suspect Palmer had these (and other) Maya sculptures by about 1968 if not before.

After their appearance in those photographs, the murk deepened…until 2013 and 2015. Lamb’s carvings have since come to light. Both are now in private collections. The carving we label “Laxtunich Lintel 4,” seen again in 2015, was accessible to the extent that our team could undertake technical assays and detailed photography of its surface (the third in this series reports on that work). The other lintel, “Laxtunich Lintel 3,” was examined by Houston in 2013, if more cursorily. The re-emergence of these storied carvings occasions a fresh evaluation of their images and an inevitable attempt, given more recent fieldwork, to pin down Lamb’s journey to Laxtunich. These thoughts build on the Dana and Ginger Lamb Papers at the Sherman Library and Gardens (Sherman Library) and fieldwork by Golden and Scherer in the Sierra del Lacandón region of Petén, Guatemala, and Chiapas, Mexico. There is a book on the Lambs, who had fascinated Franklin D. Roosevelt and yet also managed to vex J. Edgar Hoover and his myrmidons (Huffman-Klinkowitz and Klinkowitz 2006:80–81, 83–85).

Dana and Ginger Lamb in Context

As the title suggests, the Lambs' *Quest for the Lost City* (Lamb and Lamb 1951), the only primary source on the lintels, capitalized on the Maya-as-lost-civilization zeitgeist in which only the most brave and cunning adventurer-explorers could delve into the dark forests of the Maya lowlands. Certainly, the earliest detailed studies of the Maya were carried out by truly hardy chroniclers—Stephens, Charnay, Maudslay, and Maler, to name a few. These first explorers combined meticulous documentation with a healthy dose of grit to traverse the then-remote jungles of Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. By mid-twentieth century, however, the lone intrepid explorer was largely extinct (the recently deceased Ian Graham being a notable exception). Maya studies was largely in the hands of institutionally supported scientific archaeological teams, such as those supported by the Carnegie Institution of Washington and the University of Pennsylvania. Although these early scientific expeditions advanced our understanding of the ancient Maya, they did little to satisfy public hunger for tales of exotic jungle adventure.

Enter Dana and Ginger Lamb. Almost two decades prior to the publication of *Quest for the Lost City,* and shortly after their marriage in 1933, the couple set out on a three-year journey in a homemade canoe from California to Panama. They chronicled this voyage in their first book, *Enchanted Vagabonds,* published in 1938 with the help of a bookseller named June Cleveland (Huffman-Klinkowitz and Klinkowitz 2006:24–25). After its release, they embarked on a successful public speaking tour. *Enchanted Vagabonds* drew on the long-standing public fascination with adventure-exploration. Yet, in their tale, the Lambs offered something new and appealing. Explorers of yesteryear were for the most part privileged men from the upper crust of European and American society. Dana and Ginger were youthful, middle-class, plucky newlyweds from California, 37 and 26 years old respectively, when *Enchanted Vagabonds* was first published.

In many respects, *Quest for the Lost City*, was *Enchanted Vagabonds* 2.0—a follow-up story of adventure but now in the remote and treacherous forests of southern Mexico, a place populated with "mysterious" natives (the Lacandon Maya) and lost ruins. More than a ten-year gap separates the publication of *Enchanted Vagabonds* and *Quest for the Lost City*, at least some of which was spent by the Lambs traveling in Mexico. *Quest for the Lost City* was finally published in 1951 and remains in print today, its current paperback cover boldly proclaiming "America's most dangerous couple explores the jungles of Central America…An Adventure Travel Classic." The book dramatically builds to a final conclusion, the discovery of an entire "lost city," Laxtunich itself. *Quest for the Lost City* was followed by a film of the same name in

1954, released by Sol Lesser Productions ([Quest for Lost City]). Lesser fit the bill: he had guided and promoted the Tarzan movies starring Johnny Weissmuller and later served as American producer (and Academy Award winner) for *Kon-Tiki*, an account of Thor Heyerdahl's voyage across the Pacific.

For the layperson, *Quest for the Lost City* is a gripping page-turner. However, anyone familiar with southern Mexico will realize that, even by the mid-twentieth century, the region travelled and described by the Lambs was not nearly as vast, remote, and unknown as they report. Nearly all scholars (and many a layperson, judging by recent Amazon reviews of *Quest for the Lost City*), deride the book as a fabrication and the Lambs as charlatans looking to turn a profit from a credulous American audience. This sense is only heightened by the 1955 follow-up film of the same title, in which the Dana and Ginger pass off well-known and traveled sites like Yaxchilan and Palenque as ruins lost deep in the jungle. By this point, too, the heading of their stationery says it all: "Dan and Ginger Lamb, Exploration—Motion Pictures" (AMNH Files, letter to Gordon Ekholm, dated July 6, 1950). Yet there is no doubt the Lambs (or, as we will see, at least Dana) did visit an archaeological site, his "Site 5," that at the time (and to this day) remains unknown to scholars. His notes offer the only description we have of the site, and he and his companions took the only known in situ photographs of the remarkable Laxtunich carvings.

So what exactly were the Lambs up to in southern Mexico, and where is the so-called site of Laxtunich?

In Search of Laxtunich

Lamb's own account of visiting the site is, as Graham observed, pure claptrap. It offers swarming bugs, an overwhelming thirst, barely resolved by slurping from *bejuco de agua* ("we drank too much and were sick"), aqueducts and artesian wells like "miniature 'volcanoes'," as well as, towards nightfall, "the frightening, swelling song of a hurricane" (Lamb and Lamb 1951:330–331). And a tree fall that had, after this "titanic, terrific, stupendous, slam-bang show…carried away our beautiful temple" in one final cataclysm (Lamb and Lamb 1951:334; to be sure, on its reverse, a photograph in the AMNH archive refers to a tree fall on the lintel building). All the "beautiful stone carvings had been shattered and tossed to the jungle floor," and the Lambs, amazed, saw that were now "on an island surrounded by a muddy sea of water" (Lamb and Lamb 1951:335). Despite a bout of malaria—"Dan, I can't breathe. I'm burning up!"—Ginger soldiered on, trying "to lend a hand" (Lamb and Lamb 1951:332–333). After manfully carving a canoe, Dana Lamb succeeded in paddling them to safety.

Dana's field notebook, a personal letter he wrote to Ginger, and his hand-drawn maps tell a different story. Our presumption is that, in these records, Dana offers some semblance of accuracy. That he was a compulsive fabulist is reflected in his correspondence with Ekholm a short time after his visit to Laxtunich. Lamb seems to place the discovery sometime in June, at the latest in early May, a date contradicted by his notebook, which assigns the find to April 7 (AMNH archive, letter to Ekholm, July 6, 1950; "We got in yesterday [July 5] after over a month off in the unexplored area in Guatemala"). In a marked photo of Lintel 2, he claimed it has been "found at site #5 [Laxtunich] in Guatemala in June 1950" (AMNH archive). What stratagem lay behind this pointless deceit? Nor was Ginger even present at the discovery. Was the thrill of their narrative—always a marital adventure, a cheerful collaboration of paired souls—more important than any commitment to veracity? One gathers that Lamb tended to self-grandiosity and a compulsion to rework personal experience into high drama: each event would serve its role in the script of his life.

On April 2, 1950, Dana travelled to Agua Azul, a now-abandoned airstrip on the Chiapas side of the Usumacinta River, about 7 km upstream (southeast) from the Guatemalan community of Bethel. Dana received reports of "large ruins on the Guatemalan side of the Yaxchilan Ruins" and that there "is a boy who thinks he knows where they are" (Dana Lamb, Personal Journal, April 3, 1950). On April 4, Dana and a number of local guides headed downstream in a *cayuco* (a canoe carved from the trunk of a tree) past Yaxchilan to a point then known as Salvamento, an area that corresponds to the first bend in the Usumacinta River north of Yaxchilan (Canter 2007:7). Dana reports the distances by river as 8.5 leagues (the equivalent of 47.2 km) from Agua Azul to Yaxchilan and 3.5 leagues (19.4 km) from Yaxchilan to Salvamento, again by river. The actual distances are closer to 35 km and 16 km respectively, the point being that, while Dana is not a bad judge of distance (it is unclear what maps he had with him when he was writing his journal), he tends to overestimate the distances covered.

After that first day's travel Dana and his companions established a beach camp on the Guatemalan side of the river, and the next day he reports that "we hiked down river [sic] opposite an arroyo called Enenete [Anaite] then cut a trail inland almost due north" (April 5). What follows is Dana's description of that day's journey, edited to remove his vivid commentary on the various accomplishments and shortcomings of his travel companions:

"We found a chicley [sic] trail after going thru heavy bamboo and undergrowth for about a mile. From here the trail lead up and down thru low hills for about two miles. . .the going was not easy in the heat…at noon when we stopped for lunch there was no

water…after lunch we continued on. This trail used to be wide and well traveled but has not been used in many years. So we had to cut around the fallen trees and open trail most of the way…After traveling 6 leguas [sic] we stopped for a rest and Jose and Armando said they were going ahead to scout the trail. We waited for over an hour and then they returned with a pot full of muddy water. Instead of scouting trail they had gone off to a Lechugal about a mile away for water."

Although we do not have personal experience with the inland journey from this point on the Usumacinta River, the route Dana reports is likely the same as that described by Ron Canter (2007:7): "on the Guatemalan shore, a ravine leads east up to a small plateau 80 m above the river. From there it is a relatively easy climb NE out of the river gorge." On his map, Canter notes the existence of a nineteenth-century trail running between La Pasadita and Centro Campesino, the area across from Yaxchilan that was home to an invader community in the first decade of this century (Figure 5). Teobert Maler (1903:104–105) notes the existence of "forest trails" connecting Tenosique to the Arroyo Yaxchilan (a stream that passes about 4.5 km to the southeast of the site of Yaxchilan on the Guatemalan side of the Usumacinta River). Indeed, our own reconnaissance attests to the existence of many overgrown logging trails running between the area of Yaxchilan and north and northeast towards La Pasadita. In 1998, Golden (et al. 1999) and a group of colleagues made the trip from Yaxchilan to La Pasadita along just such a route.

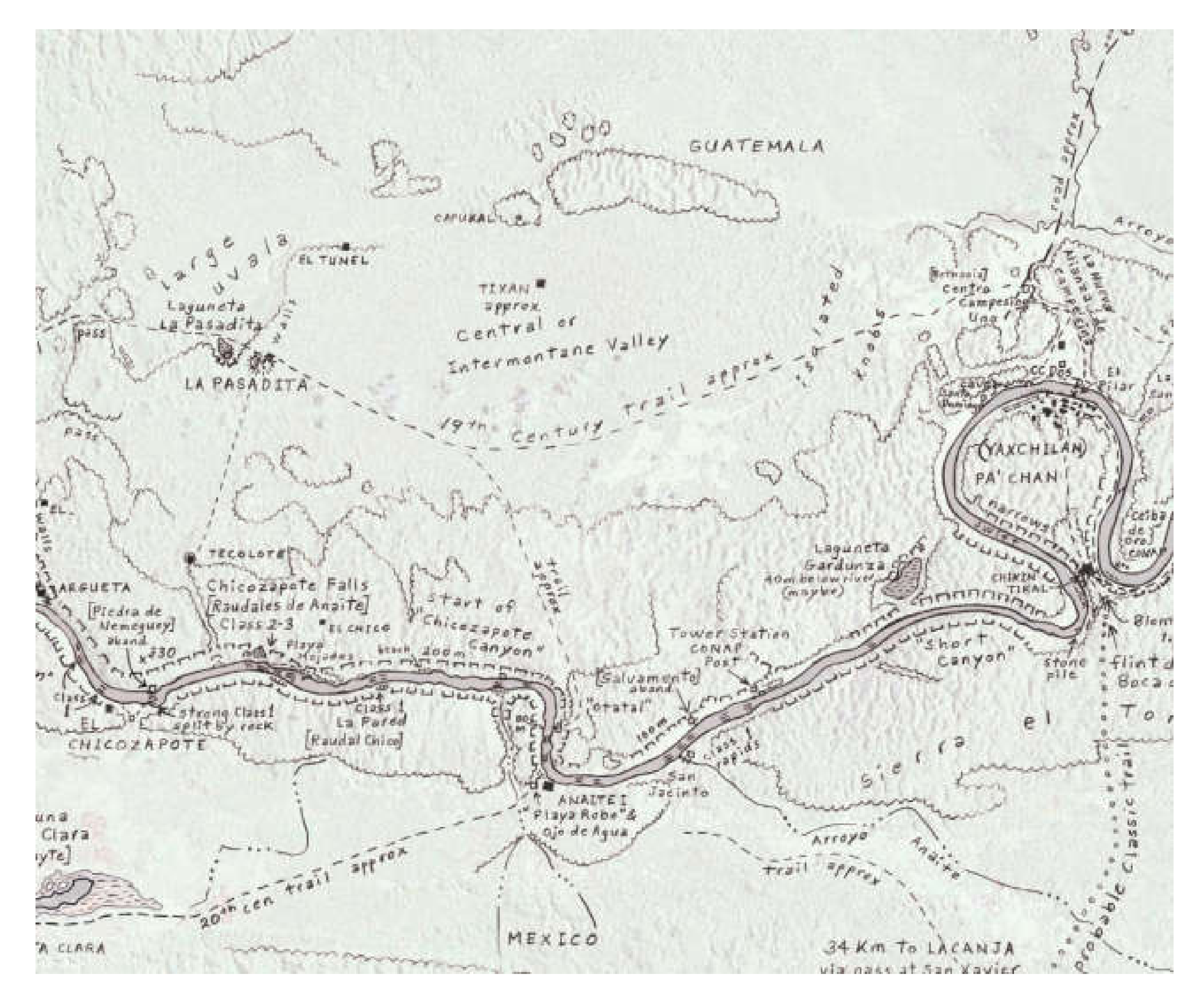


__Figure 5__. Excerpt of Ron Canter's Río Usumacinta Navigation Survey.

Scherer and Omar Alcover undertook a similar journey in 2014, reaching and departing from La Pasadita via two separate logging trails. Both paths were relatively clear at the time, having been re-opened by settlers during the illegal invasion at Centro Campesino in the first decade of the new millennium (Figure 6).

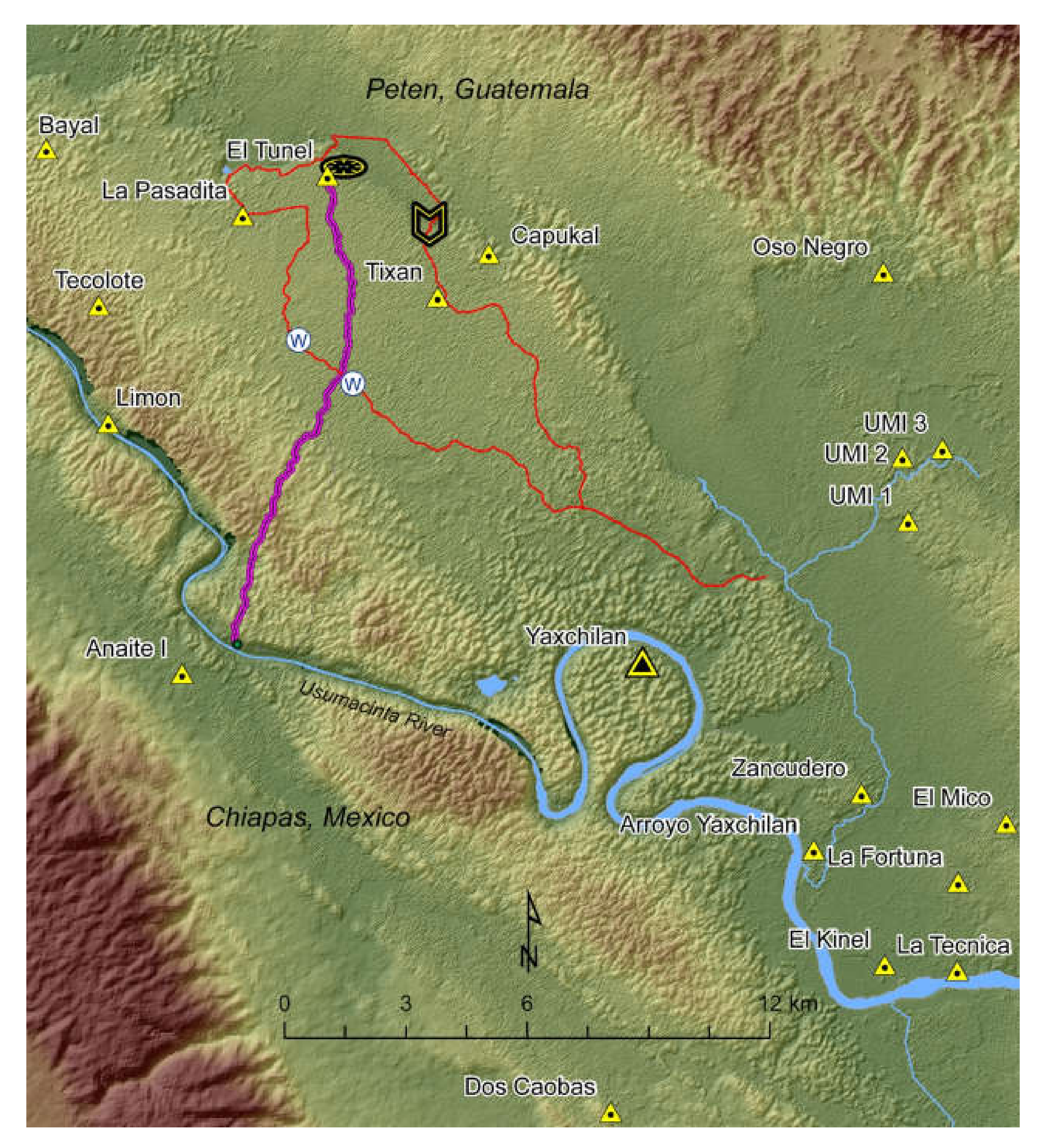


Figure 6. *Southern Sierra del Lacandón National Park showing likely area of Laxtunich in Guatemala. The red path indicates trails used by Scherer and Alcover in 2014 trip between Centro Campesino and La Pasadita. The purple path represents the least-cost route between Salvamento and El Tunel, the hypothetical path walked by Dana Lamb (compare with Figure 8). "W" denotes aguadas. Partly spoked dircle is a cenote at El Tunel. Chevron is a point along the arroyo that traverses the region, illustrated in Figure 5.*

Moreover, Scherer and Alcover traveled with guides who had decades of experience in the region, and thus were able to move with relative dispatch on their journey. They traveled at brisk clip, if with heavy packs, along a route that took them 22 km in 8 to 9 hours from Centro Campesino to La Pasadita (Figure 7). From our experience, 20 km is a generous maximum estimate for any distance covered by Dana and his companions while cutting trails.

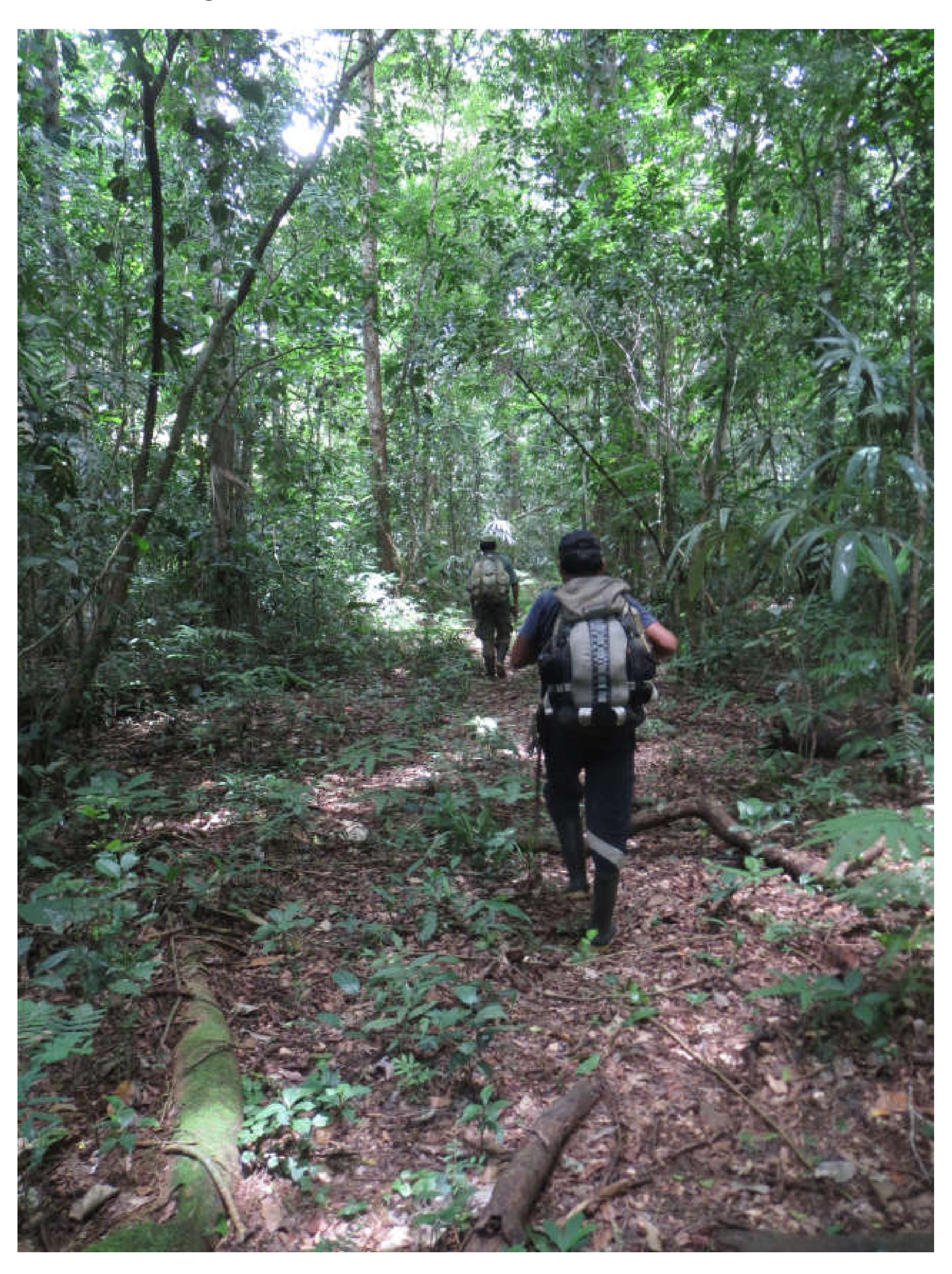


Figure 7*. Walking a recently opened logging trail south of La Pasadita, Guatemala, 2014, taken near the aguadas in Figure 6 (photograph by A. Scherer).*

Of the two trails travelled by Scherer and Alcover in 2014, the one closest to the Usumacinta River is about 6.75 km northeast of the point from which Dana likely left that body of water. Dana's own hand-drawn map suggests they moved in a general northward direction (it is unknown, although likely, that he carried a compass, Figures 8 and 9). From Dana's description, he and his companions travelled about four to five km (three miles) north or northwest before lunchtime. He then suggests they travelled 6 leagues, the equivalent of 18 miles or 33 km, before their next rest after lunch, when two of his companions went ahead to scout the trail and returned with the muddy water. A frustrated Dana writes in his journal, "I was anxious to go on ahead and get to the ruins before dark but Jose said he was not sure of the trail and that we could not make it before dark. Reluctantly we hit the side trail to the Lechugal & slung our hamocks [sic]" (April 5).

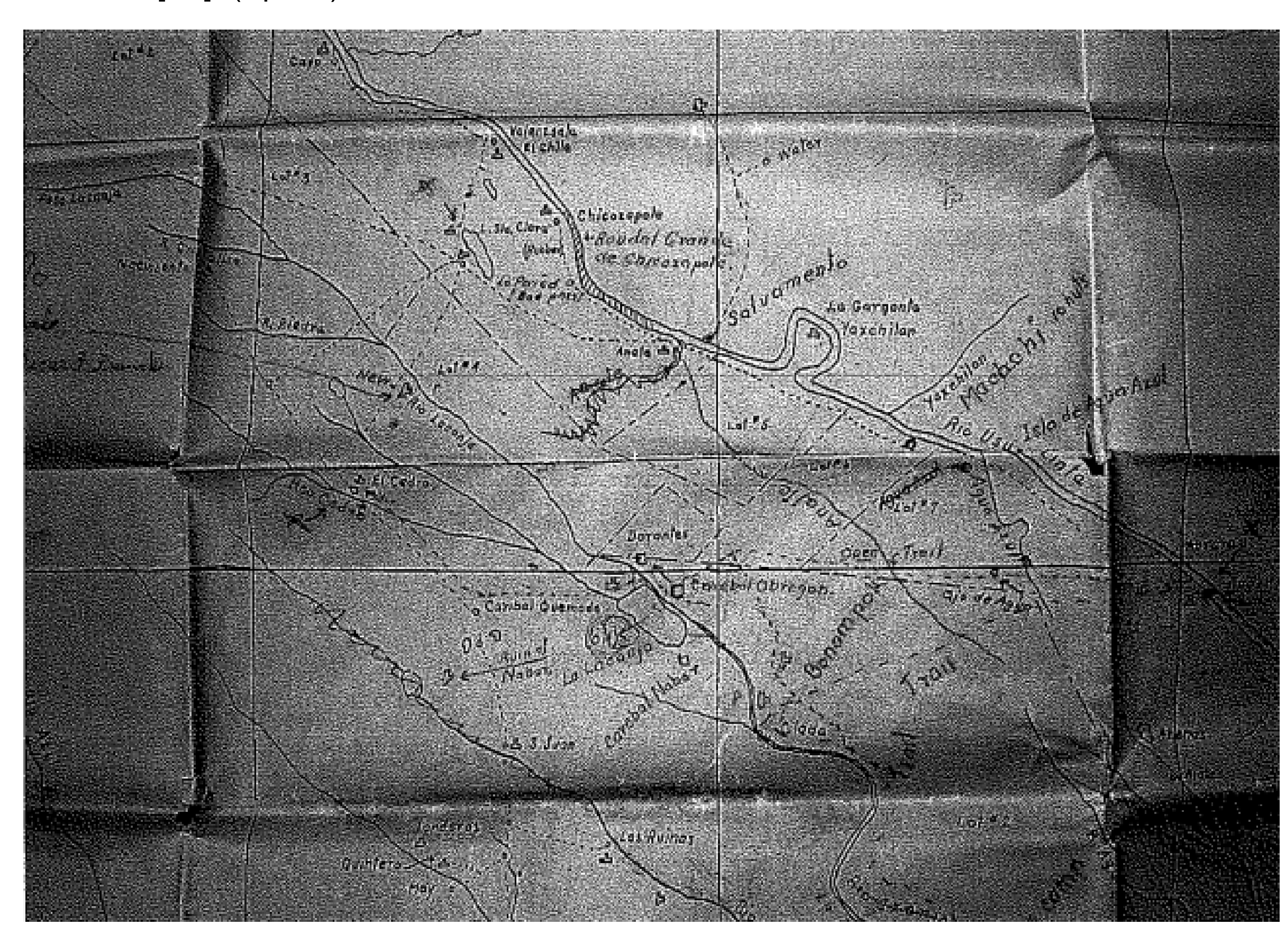


Figure 8. *Dana Lamb's map of trails leading from Salvamento, Guatemala (image from Julie Huffman-Klinkowitz, courtesy Sherman Library and Gardens).*

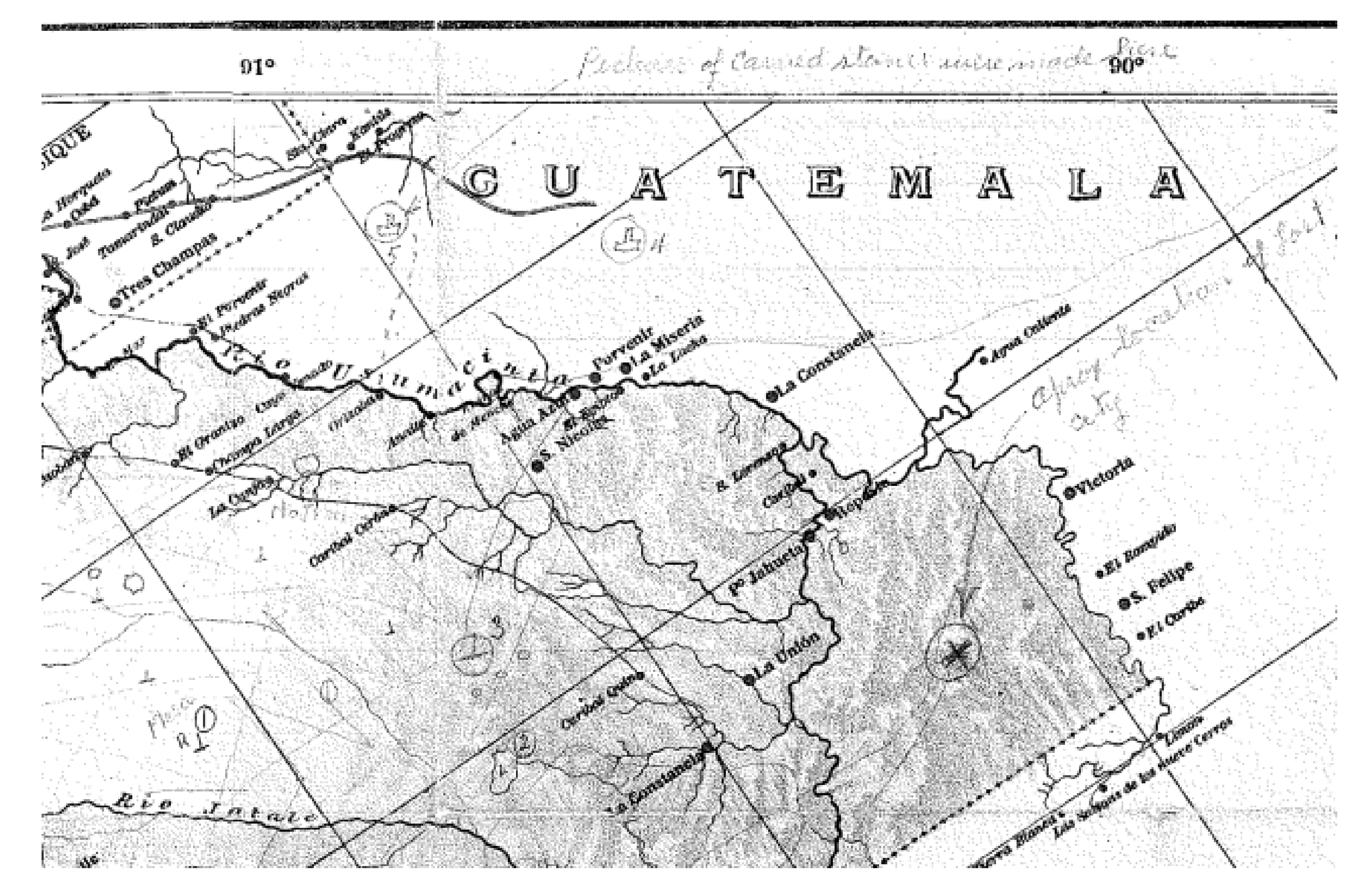


Figure 9. *Dana Lamb's notation of his "Site 5" (Laxtunich), with notation "Pictures of carved stones were made here" (image from Julie Huffman-Klinkowitz, courtesy Sherman Library and Gardens).*

Dana is almost certainly mistaken about the 33 km that he and his companions covered between lunchtime and their evening stop at the watering hole. To put this scale in perspective, Piedras Negras is just a bit more than 40 km in a straight line north of Yaxchilan. A starting point around Salvamento and the Arroyo Anaite, 33 km to the north or northwest would simply funnel them into the narrow valley approaching Piedras Negras, while 30 km in any other direction east or northeast would require crossing the arduous and precipitous hills of the Sierra del Lacandón. Dana would surely have noted this in his journal.

Since they were re-cutting an overgrown trail, a more reasonable estimate is that Dana and his companions walked between 6 to 10 km total by mid-afternoon, placing them in all probability somewhere along one of the very same overgrown trails south of La Pasadita hiked by Scherer and Alcover in 2014. According to Lamb's own map (which has no scale) the water source is at a latitude just north of the Laguna Santa Clara in Chiapas, a distance that would be about 13 km due north. Again, that is likely incorrect in view of the time needed to move such a distance over an overgrown path. On their

own return journey from La Pasadita, Scherer and Alcover identified an exceptionally muddy aguada along one of the old logging trails, about 7.5 km in a direct line from the Usumacinta River (longer if following the overgrown trails). This is a potential, although by no means certain, candidate for the watering hole visited by Dana and his companions.

Dana and his companion returned to the trail the next day and, according to him, "hiked three leguas (12 mi) to a dry arroyo then cut a trail about one mile due W. to the ruins" (April 6). Dana then writes and crosses-out: "After we had finished our. After a supper of beans and rice we hit the hamocks [sic]." He finally settles on: "On the Way into the ruins Arnold shot a small deer and we had a late supper of cooked venison [sic]. There is no water in this area so we used Agua de Bejuca [sic]" (April 6). Again, it is highly implausible that Dana and his companions hiked 12–13 miles (19-–21 km) on the second day of their journey. All known logging trails in this area follow a north or northwesterly path. Had they crossed beyond the known northern limits of the Yaxchilan kingdom (Tecolote, La Pasadita, etc.), the party would have slogged through the bajo around the Laguna La Pasadita, and into the formidably rugged terrain to the north. An eastward path would have kept them within the kingdom and brought them into the vicinity of Oso Negro. But, again, the old logging paths they appear to have been traveling do not cut an easterly route. More likely, Dana and his companions travelled 10 km or less that second day.

An important clue to Laxtunich's location is the dry arroyo recorded by Dana. Although we do not know its precise route over the landscape, Scherer and Alcover twice crossed an arroyo that drains into the Laguna La Pasadita (Figure 10, see Figure 6 for its location along one of the trails). This arroyo passes through the site of Tixan, where it was dammed in ancient times. Similarly, Golden and colleagues camped near an arroyo in this same vicinity in March of 1998, when it held a thin trickle of water. This is likely the same arroyo that flows through the site of El Tunel, apparently passing through a cave (hence the name of the site, Muñoz and Román 2004:20). When Scherer and Alcover crossed the arroyo near Tixan in 2014, it carried little water, although volume increased when they encountered it a second time near its confluence with the Laguna La Pasadita. Dana notes no other arroyos in his journal. If we assume a generally northward route of travel, the arroyo near La Pasadita, Tixan, and El Tunel would have been the first such waterway encountered by the Lamb party. That it was dry offers no surprise in that they were traveling at the very end of the dry season. In contrast, Scherer and Alcover observed the arroyo at the height of the rainy season, and even then it held little water.



***Figure 10**. Dam on a partially dry arroyo near Tixan, Guatemala (photograph by A. Scherer).*

After a night camping near the ruins, Dana and his companions travelled to “Site 5,” where they spent the entire day exploring. As Dana describes in his journal, in an entry dated April 7:

“At one time this place was a large city. Now all of it is in ruins except one temple which is partly destroyed. There are two beautifully carved temple stones here. The best I have ever seen. They measure about four feet wide and six feet long but are broken in half. We spent all day exploring around and moving the stones so we could get pictures of them. At noon we had more venison and then worked at the Temple. This ruin is completely unknown so we decided to name it the Place of the Carved Stones, in Maya it is Lashch Tu Nich.”

Dana’s descriptions of the monuments accord well with the photographs that were taken at the site (Figures 2–4). Both lintels are in situ, both broken medially, each fallen from the doorway of a collapsed vaulted structure. Dana also drew a sketch of the site center of Laxtunich, though it is exceptionally vague in its detail, showing a series of plazas and ruined buildings (Figure 11). He marks the two lintels as “alter [sic] stones,” indicating they were found in front of the same structure. Another useful feature of Dana’s map is the presence of a “Dry Sonote” [sic] in the upper left corner of the map, a feature that will be key to identifying the site center of Laxtunich in the future.

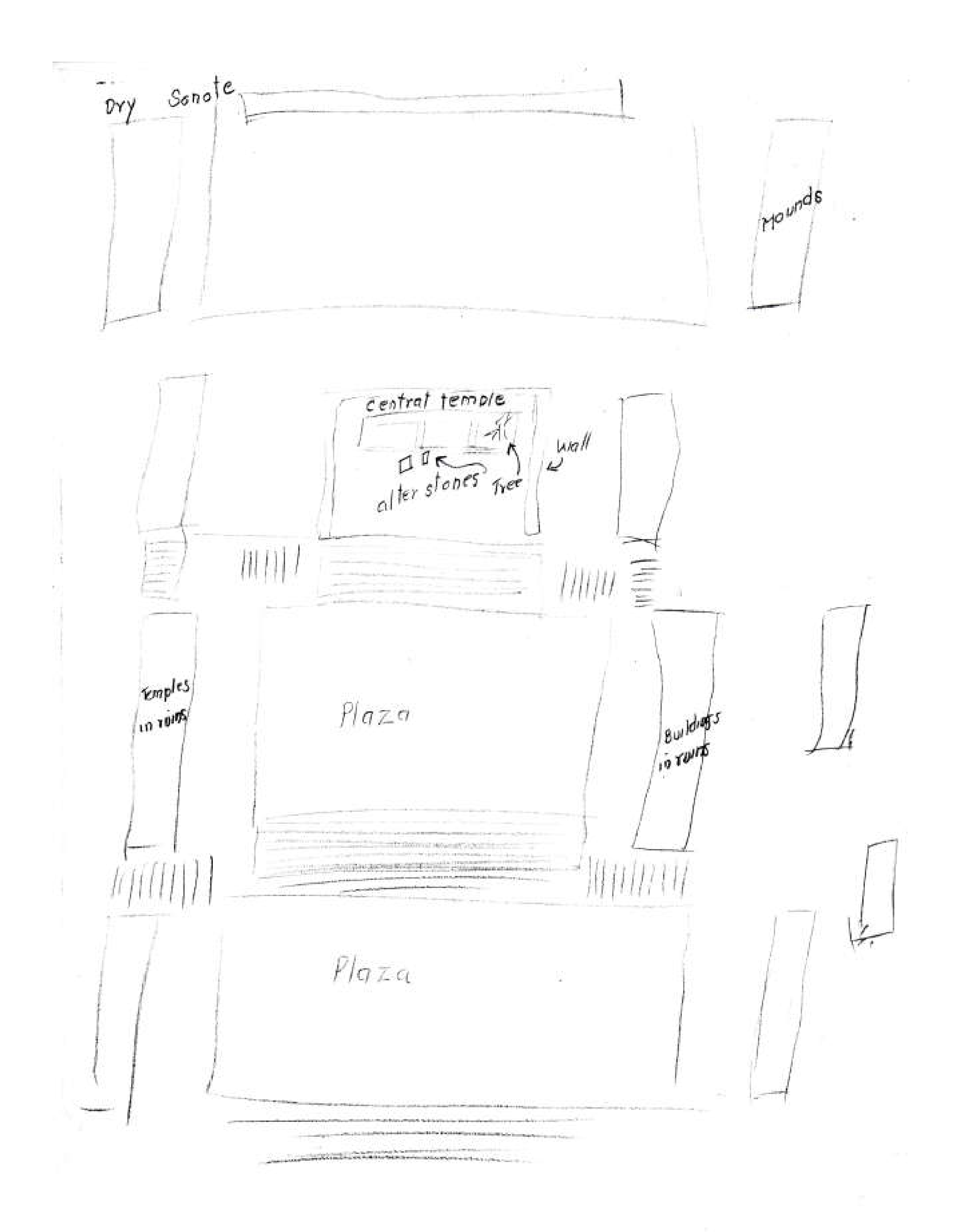


***Figure 11**. Dana Lamb's sketch map of Laxtunich (image from Julie Huffman-Klinkowitz, courtesy Sherman Library and Gardens).*

On April 8, Dana and his companions made their return trip, reaching the Usumacinta River in a single day's journey. Because Dana and his companions were backtracking on a now-open trail, it is reasonable to suggest they travelled about 15 km or so that day. By April 25, Dana was back in Tenosique where he penned a letter to Ginger (who at the time, and directly contrary to the published account, was in the United States). Here he summarizes the trip: "Enrique Nevelo, Manuel and I went down the Usumacenta [sic] to a place below Yaxchilan then headed deep into Guatemala. We found a beautiful little ruin with some of the finest stone carving I have ever seen. It was a rough trip as there is no water in this area and we had to live off of Agua de Bejuco."

According to the same letter, Dana made a series of other visits to sites in the area over the next two weeks, including a stop at Yaxchilan on the return from Laxtunich as well as trips to Bonampak and what is likely Lacanja. Photographs of these visits appear in *Quest for the Lost City*. He concluded his journey at El Cedro, where he took a plane back to Tenosique. Ginger appears to have flown down in early May, and they spent the next month or so again traveling in southern Mexico, presumably shooting additional photos and video for *Quest for the Lost City*, although with no evidence they returned to the unknown site in Guatemala.

Where is Laxtunich?

Matching Dana's description of his travels and his maps with our own experience in the region, we believe it highly likely that Laxtunich lies somewhere in the vicinity of La Pasadita and a cluster of poorly explored sites that includes El Tunel, Capukal, and Tixan. It is far less plausible that Laxtunich corresponds to La Pasadita or its twin, Tecolote, located a few kilometers to the west. Tecolote has many collapsed vaulted structures, but its most remarkable feature is a single well-preserved standing structure with fragmentary murals (Scherer and Golden 2009) that Dana would have seen and recorded in his notes. Moreover, there is no cenote at Tecolote nor is it near an arroyo. Similarly, La Pasadita does not have a cenote and its principal structure was still standing in 1950, likely with its own carved lintels and murals still in place. If Dana had visited La Pasadita we can assume he would have made note of such striking images.

Capukal and El Tunel were first visited by archaeologists in 2004 during a brief reconnaissance trip by René Muñoz and Edwin Román (2005; Golden et al. 2005). El Tunel was revisited in 2005 by Juan Carlos Meléndez and Scherer who also managed to reconnoiter the site of Tixan (Meléndez and Scherer 2005; Vasquéz et al. 2006). The archaeologists discerned an abundance of settlement at each of these sites but, owing to a lack of time on both visits, they were unable to identify or pinpoint their

epicenters. In that regards it is important to keep in mind that Dana reports only a single monumental structure that was already partially in ruins during his visit in 1950. Thus, even if archaeologists had reached the principal structure of Laxtunich in 2004 or 2005, it is entirely possible they may have overlooked the structure, assuming that by that time its vault was fully collapsed.

Of these named sites, Capukal is the least credible as Dana's Laxtunich. Muñoz and Román note that the buildings at Capukal disperse into a pattern reminiscent of Fideo, a known Late Preclassic site to the northwest. Further, the only ceramic observed on the surface during reconnaissance at Capukal dated to the Early Classic period (Muñoz and Román 2005:20). In contrast, Tixan and El Tunel possess architecture more closely reminiscent of known secondary centers of Late Classic period Yaxchilan. Tixan was only briefly visited by Meléndez and Scherer in 2005 and they were never able to locate its political and architectural center, if indeed it has one. It exhibits an area of extensive settlement, and further survey is needed to determine to what degree settlement may be more or less contiguous between the areas currently identified as La Pasadita, El Tunel, and Tixan.

El Tunel, on the other hand, was more thoroughly surveyed by both Muñoz and Román and then by Meléndez and Scherer. Meléndez and Scherer (2005:62) observed the careful use of both large block and smaller flat stone similar to details observed in buildings at Tecolote and La Pasadita. These features characterize the well-preserved constructions of the Late Classic period in the kingdom of Yaxchilan (Figure 12). Moreover, defensive walls have been identified in the vicinity of El Tunel, similar to those found at Tecolote and La Pasadita (Muñoz and Román 2004:19).



Figure 12*. Preserved wall on a structure at El Tunel; Juan Carlos Meléndez provides human scale (photograph by A. Scherer).*

Even more compelling, Muñoz and Román detected the presence of at least one collapsed vaulted structure at El Tunel with the remains of a looted crypt (Muñoz and Román 2004:19). Vaulted buildings with such crypts have also been identified at Tecolote and La Pasadita, and such patterns similarly echo the sub-floor crypts found in palace structures at Yaxchilan and Bonampak (Miller and Brittenham 2013:24, fig. 33). The collapsed vaulted structure found by Muñoz and Román should be considered a possible contender for the source of the Laxtunich lintels, though they did not observe any monument carcasses during their investigations. Recall that, as noted above, the name El Tunel is in reference to an arroyo that flows near the site. Finally, during their reconnaissance of the site, Meléndez and Scherer observed a dry cenote at El Tunel, although they failed to take detailed notes regarding its relationship to other structures at the site (see its location on Figure 6).

A least-cost path plotted from several starting points in Guatemala opposite the Arroyo Anaite to El Tunel creates a path similar in appearance to Lamb's sketch map, and seems to cross at or near similar landmarks, including well-used trails (compare Figures 6 and 8). Moreover, this modeled path crosses the real path marked by Scherer and Alcover. near where they encountered two water-holes (aguadas), perhaps the source of Lamb's "muddy water." If El Tunel is indeed Laxtunich, and the computer-modeled path is anything like that followed by Lamb and his companions, the actual distance traveled from river to site (barring wayward turns) would be in the vicinity of 13 km (~ 8 mi).

Envoi

In short, all evidence indicates the site of Laxtunich is located somewhere to the east of Tecolote, to the west of Oso Negro, and in the general vicinity of La Pasadita, El Tunel, Tixan, and Capukal. This is an area of generally dense settlement where much of the Late Classic period architecture conforms to that of the greater Yaxchilan kingdom. Of these, in our judgment, El Tunel is the best contender as the source of the Laxtunich lintels. It has architecture in Late Classic period Yaxchilan style, it possesses at least one collapsed vaulted structure with a looted crypt, has defensive walls, a dry cenote, and is located near an arroyo—all features of Laxtunich noted in Dana's journal. The chances are high that slabs of sliced limestone are still there, left by looters in the 1960s. It is a shame indeed that Lamb did not follow through, as he had promised to Gordon Ekholm in 1951, on a more scholarly publication for the Carnegie Institution of Washington's "Notes in Middle America" series (sic, "Notes on Middle American Archaeology and Ethnology." AMNH archives, letter dated Jan. 25, 1951). The recollections might have been sharper, the details more accurate. But the pledge to Ekholm was probably yet another deception. A factually grounded essay would have undermined the tall tales in his book.

Quest for the Lost City and the two Laxtunich lintels persist as part of a frustrating yet fortunate chapter in Maya studies. The adventures reported by Dana and Ginger are, we now know, fabrications meant to sell a book. They do little to advance our understanding of the ancient Maya. Yet the true, unreported story—of a foreign visitor who spent a few days in the jungle in the company of local guides—is not unlike how we ourselves "discover" new archaeological sites (though such tales hardly make for fascinating storytelling). The Laxtunich lintels are masterworks of Maya art, torn from their source and rarely seen by scholars, much less appreciated by the greater public. Yet Dana's photographs exist. He drew us maps that give us a general sense of the site's location and, most important, took detailed notes of his travels to the site. From these clues, we can be reasonably secure in knowing not only the country of origin

(Guatemala) but even the 20 km^2area of the Sierra del Lacandón National Park that likely produced the lintels. Future survey in the region, as aided by remote sensing and the search for thinned remnants, will transform Lamb's "lost city" into one that is found.

Acknowledgments

Some of the ideas presented in this series of blogs were first presented at the Center for the Advanced Study of Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, where Houston held an Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellowship in 2014–2015 (Houston and Urton 2015), and at the Wayeb Meetings in Moscow (Houston et al. 2016). The Lamb archive at the Sherman Library and Gardens, Corona del Mar, California, was most generous with access, as was Dr. Charles Spencer, Sumru Arincali, Barry Landua, and Kristin Mable at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), New York. Mary Miller first drew our attention to the Lamb-Ekholm correspondence at the AMNH. Ron Canter's map of the Usumacinta was most helpful, as was Julie Huffman-Klinkowitz, who supplied crucial pieces of information from her collection of Lambiana. Michael Coe provided recollections of that Mayanist "Howard Hughes," William Palmer III.

Note 1. William Pendleton Palmer III (1932–1982) was an heir to a Cleveland, Ohio, steel and mining fortune. His grandfather, William Pendleton Palmer (1861–1927), had amassed that wealth by working his way up from an apprenticeship to Presidency of the American Steel and Wire Company; along the way, he also served as a Director of the Cleveland Trust Co., H. C. Frick Coke Co., and the Bank of Commerce (WPP), with substantial investments in the Hanna Mining Company of Cleveland (Hanna and Palmer and Hanna). A member of the American Antiquarian Society from 1914 on, and President of the Western Reserve Historical Society from 1913 until his death, the Founder had collected a quantity of Civil War manuscripts and Lincoln memorabilia, indeed, on all aspects of antebellum life, for eventual donation to the Society, "Cleveland's oldest cultural institution" (Western Reserve and Collection). The Founder would not have known his namesake—he died five years before Palmer III was born. But his acquisitive urges and antiquarian interests had some impact. For a time, Palmer III was one of the most energetic collectors of Maya pieces in the world. Our only account of him, "a bit like Howard Hughes, but on a less extravagant scale, and far more generous," comes from Michael Coe (personal communication, Aug. 23, 2017; quotation from Coe 2006:199), who met Palmer while preparing "The Maya Scribe and His World" exhibit for the Grolier Club in New York City (April 20 to June 5, 1971). Learning that the collector had a large number of Classic Maya pots, Coe was flown on Palmer's private plane, piloted by a retired Air Force colonel, to Falmouth,

Maine, where Palmer lived. (Palmer was, according to Coe and Graham, the then-owner of Bar Harbor Airlines.) Coe remembers two totem poles from the Northwest Coast lying prone, and somewhat forlorn, outside the main residence. The cellar of a second building was given over to racks of magazines and newspapers curated by an older man. When asked about this surprising hoard, "a quarter century's worth of old numbers of the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and other newspapers and journals," Palmer replied, "I just want to look things up when I feel like it" (Coe 2006:199). Coe did not see the Laxtunich lintels, which might already have been in Switzerland.

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August 29, 2017

Original post now deleted

https://decipherment.wordpress.com/2017/08/29/a-universe-in-a-maya-lintel-ii-mayuy-and-his-masterworks/

A Universe in a Maya Lintel II: Mayuy and his Masterworks

by mayoid • Uncategorized

by **Stephen Houston** (Brown University), **James Doyle** (Metropolitan Museum of Art), **David Stuart** (UT-Austin), and **Karl Taube** (UC-Riverside)

Signed works have multiple craftsmen or makers (Houston 2016:414–415, tables 13.4, 13.5; also Montgomery 1995; Stuart 1989)?

Consider stemmatology, a kind of research, a minutely argued procedure, by which the genealogy of certain manuscripts achieves a semblance of order (van Reenen et al. 2004). This document led to that one; both came ultimately from another source, one not necessarily preserved to the present, and so on. For Classic Maya texts and images, there can be no doubt, for example, that those shaping Tikal Stela 22, from the reign of Yax Nuun Ahiin II, were influenced by—as "retentions"—the details and messaging of Stela 21, a carving of his father, Yik'in Chan K'awiil (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:figs. 29, 31).

Sketches (done on palm leaf or bark?) do not survive, eliminating a good part of the plot, and most graffiti that do exist seem inexpert and rapid, evoking finished works nearby, showing the incision of a low-quality original or direct observation of events in plazas below (e.g., Źrałka 2014:figs. 69–80; Trik and Kampen 1983:figs. 38, 48, 71, 72, 73). Some scholars suppose that many were even the work of children or subadults, although that intriguing proposal may be hard to prove (Hutson 2011). The complex stemmata of well-executed texts on walls at Xultun, Guatemala, can only be guessed at, in that some may have been preparations for finished books, others a fair copy of the same (Saturno et al. 2012).

The idea of tendencies or retentions touches on four lintels that almost certainly came from the same hand or from carvers under the supervision of one person. Two are explicitly identified as such productions: Laxtunich Lintel 4, (Figures 2, 3), and another Laxtunich Lintel 1 now in the collection of the Kimbell Art Museum. *https://www.kimbellart.org/collection-object/presentation-captives-maya-ruler*

Current Name		Name Here		Name on List		Future Name
Mayuy Series Lintel 1	=	Laxtunich Lintel 1	=	Laxtunich Lintel 1	=	Laxtunich Lintel 3
Mayuy Series Lintel 2	=	Laxtunich Lintel 2	=	La Pasadita YAX Area Loot A	=	Laxtunich Lintel 4
Laxtunich Lintel 2	=	Laxtunich Lintel 3	=	Laxtunich Lintel 3	=	Laxtunich Lintel 2
Laxtunich Lintel 1	=	Laxtunich Lintel 4	=	Laxtunich Lintel 4	=	Laxtunich Lintel 1



Figure 2. *Laxtunich Lintel 4 (photograph by James Doyle).*

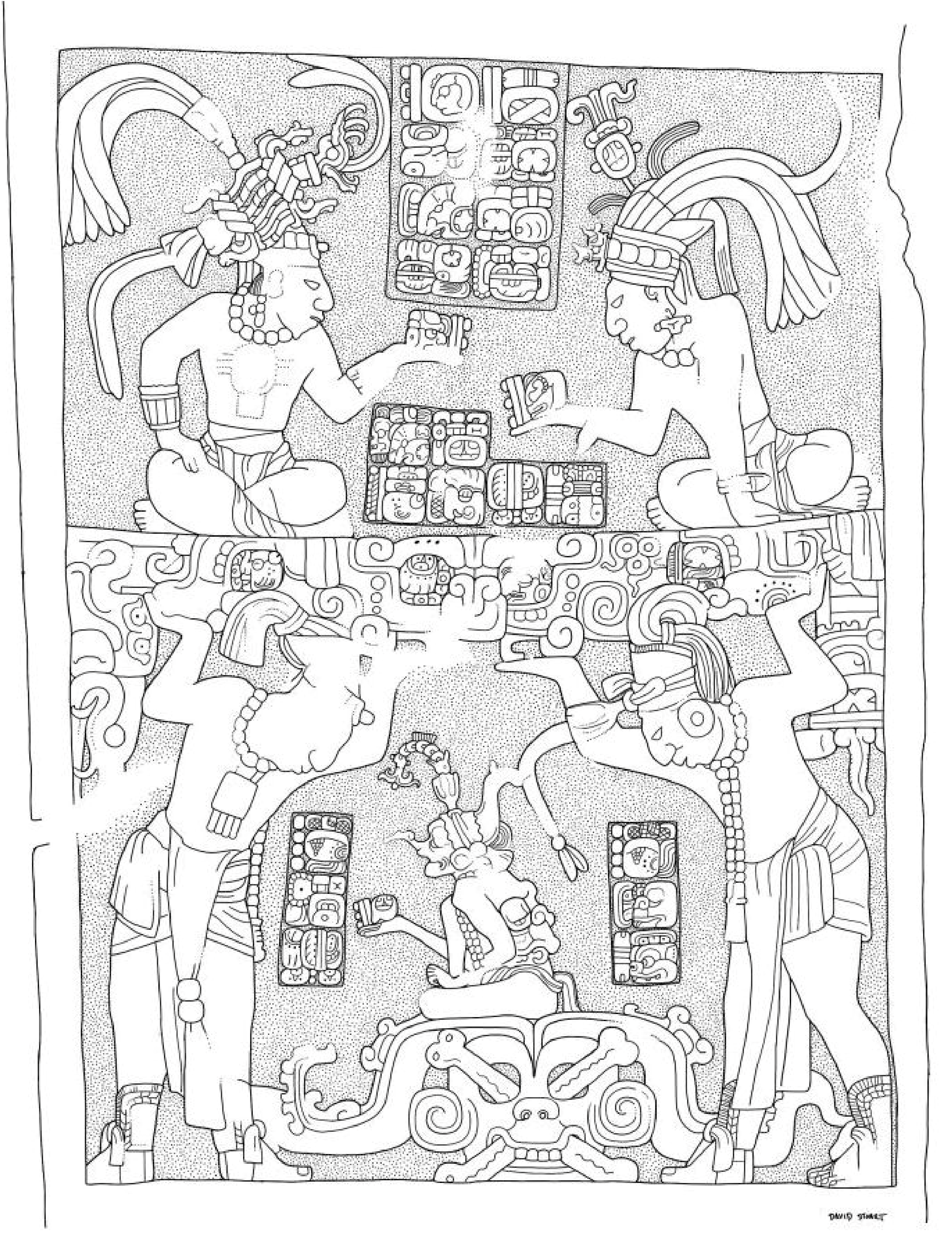


Figure 3. *Laxtunich Lintel 4 (drawing by David Stuart).*

The signature confirms such "authorship" (Figure 4): **ma-yu-yu ?-TI'** or **ma-yu-yu TI'-?**. The tags both follow the signs for "his carving/3D shaping," to some epigraphers *yuxul* but not securely so: too many examples append **lu** to the initial **yu**, casting doubt on that reading. Mayuy is probably the same as the Ch'orti' word for "fog," *mayuy* (Hull 2016:275), attested also in K'iche', *mayuy* (Kaufman 2003:478). In modern usage, the term conveys a sense of smog or contamination, possibly an emanation. Maya art applies this to other noxious vapors from the "mouth," *ti'*, a word present here. Indeed, a telling comparison comes from a Late Classic vessel in which glyphs describe a smoke-exhaling feline as "Smoking Mouth" (**pi-bi li/le?-ti-'i**, *pibil/pibel ti'*, K1250; for a vase from the same hand or workshop see Burial 128 at Altar de Sacrificios [Adams 1971:figs. 77–78]). However, the mammalian head at the end of Mayuy's name eludes decipherment. Marked with signs for "dark/night," *ak'ab*, it may be a nocturnal animal with long ear (Stone and Zender 2011:144–145), but there are insufficient clues to clinch the identification. At an impasse, we simply call him "Mayuy," drawing on the first elements of his name. Nor is there certainty that he lacked assistants. The amount of time for the lintels is sufficiently long for a single designer and, in details, a lone carver (the lintels span some 10 years or more).



***Figure 4**. Sculptor's signatures of* Mayuy*: Laxtunich Lintel 4: I1–J1 (left); Laxtunich Lintel 1:J2–J3 (right)*

As Marc Zender has shown, another component of his name spells out a place of origin: **AJ-K'IN-'a**, "he of the sun-water" or "he of the warm water" (Figure 5, Zender 2002:170–176). The compelling argument is that this location, perhaps a hot spring or some sunny spot, forms part of the ancient kingdom of Piedras Negras. But this presents a real historical puzzle, in that the carver would have come from a polity detested by those indirectly responsible for the lintels (Houston 2016:409, fig. 13.11). That is, both kingdoms were hereditary enemies, and there is evidence for only a brief entente between the two (Martin and Grube 2000:127; 2008:127). Thereafter, the dynasties returned to their more usual state of mutual loathing. Thus, Mayuy did not just arrive from a different kingdom. He was a turncoat, or, perhaps, a captive of war. Such monuments on the frontier with Piedras Negras represent an affront, a kind of "border rhetoric" or taunting between polities .



***Figure 5**. Muyuy's place of origin,* K'in'a*, with mention of same location at Palenque: (A) Laxtunich Lintel 4:K1 (B) Laxtunich Lintel 1:J4 (C) Palenque, Temple XXI, Alfarda West (D) Palenque, Tablet of the Slaves:D3l*

There are four lintels in total, including two without signatures. One, Laxtunich Lintel 3, was photographed by Dana Lamb near Lintel 4. It obviously pairs with that carving and in the same Swiss vault (Figure 6).

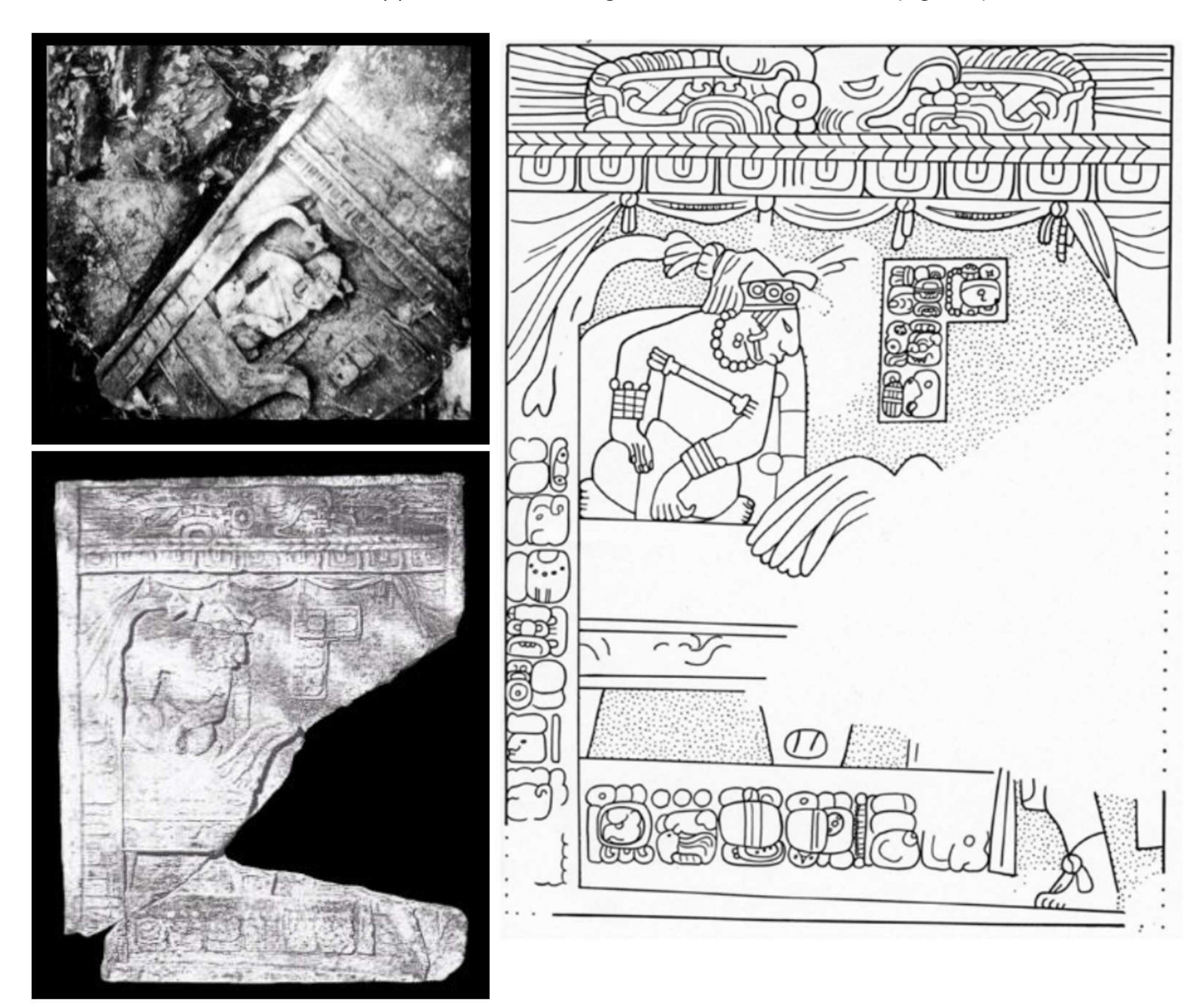


Figure 6. *Laxtunich Lintel 3, in situ and in Swiss storage. (Maya Politics: West Maya History, page 249)*

The others are: Laxtunich Lintel 1 (Kimbell panel), equipped with a Mayuy signature in the place between the commissioning noble and his overlord, Chelew Chan K'inich ("Shield Jaguar IV")(Figure 7); and a piece known only from the same set of Swiss photographs: Laxtunich Lintel 2 (Figure 8; for the overlord's name, see Zender et al. 2016) (P – PARI: PARI1702, pp 35 – 43). Future work may supplant these labels, however, and situate the carvings in the palace group visited by Lamb. When that happens, with corroboration from sawn remnants, we can and will call them "Laxtunich Lintels 3 and 4." The photos from Lamb demonstrate that these were lintels rather than wall panels, if considerably shaved down and cut into pieces for transport by mule or human. Laxtunich Lintels 2, 3 and 4 are, in fact, so fragile that only adhesive and the cross-bars hold them together.



Figure 7. *Laxtunich Lintel 1, Kimbell Art Museum*



Figure 8. *Laxtunich Lintel 2, fire-drilling scene (Drawing by Stephen Houston, after photograph Justin Kerr).*

The sequence of dates is in the Julian Calendar in the Martin-Skidmore 2012 correlation:

- Feb. 19, AD 769 (Laxtunich Lintel 2   9.16.18.00.19   1 Cauac 2 Uo);
- Nov. 6, AD 772 (Laxtunich Lintel 3   9.17.01.14.15   5 Men 3 Muan);
- March 18, AD 773 (Laxtunich Lintel 4   9.17.02.03.07   7 Manik 10 Zip);
- Aug. 20 and 23, AD 783 (Laxtunich Lintel 1, Kimbell Art Museum,   9.17.12.13.14   5 Ix 7 Zac and 9.17.12.13.17   8 Caban 10 Zac, the latter date a presentation of war captives on the carving.

The events are readily understood, in sequence:

- (1) Laxtunich Lintel 2, fire-drilling by the local *sajal*, "guardian of Bawayib," here as a youth impersonating the duck-billed wind god, and under the supervision of the king of Yaxchilan, "guardian of Taj-Mo'" (Chelew Chan K'inich)—note that duck-billed figure on his forehead and in the small jewel on his back. The overlord, the figure from Yaxchilan, impersonates what may be a centipede with watery associations. The fish reveals some of that aquatic background, as does the deity name B3. A wind and water trope loom large in Maya notions of order (Stuart 2003), but perhaps the concept here involves the emanation of wind from watery caves.
- (2) Laxtunich Lintel 3, the elevation as *sajal* of Aj Yax Bul K'uk' while Chelew Chan K'inich, labelled mostly by his Emblem glyph and as the "guardian of Taj-Mo," sits on his throne.
- (3) Laxtunich Lintel 4, the impersonation of Aj Yax Bul K'uk' as a maize god of night and Chelew Chan K'inich as the sun god.
- (4) Laxtunich Lintel 1, the Kimbell sculpture, in which Bawayib is said to have been captured, his captor firmly identified, Aj Sak Maax (**AJ-SAK-ma-xi**), "He, the White Spider Monkey" (from Common Mayan *maax, Kaufman 2003:561; see also Robertson et al. 2007:38, for the internal glottal)—precisely the same person who 14 years earlier – Laxtunich Lintel 2, drilled fire as a youth in the company of his overlord, Chelew Chan K'inich. On Laxtunich Lintel 1, he offers captives to that lord.

Even after trimming, the measurements of the lintels offer some clues (see Mayer 1995:82 for dimensions of the fire-drilling lintel; the others come from the Kimbell website and measurements by the authors):

Laxtunich Lintel 4	Ht. 129.5 cm (left)	Width 94.5 cm (bottom)
Laxtunich Lintel 3	Ht. 118.1 cm	Width 94 cm
Laxtunich Lintel 1 (Kimbell)	Ht. 115.3	Width 88.9 cm
Laxtunich Lintel 2 (Fire-drilling)	Ht. c. 100 cm	Width 80 cm

The Laxtunich lintels are relatively close in size, with allowances for mutilation by looters, and show an unusually deep relief (Figure 9). All carvings display a similar treatment of feathers, often neatly bevelled away from the central rachis, and a marked sensitivity to the weight of gravity on flesh and cloth. Belly fat, for example, pushes up from cinched garments




Figure 9. *Deep relief on Laxtunich Lintel 4 (photographs by James Doyle).*

There is another detail worth noting, one that relates to Mayuy's probable origins in an enemy kingdom. Late carvings at Piedras Negras itself, not by Mayuy but by sculptors active during his lifetime, flaunt a three-dimensional virtuosity, an undercutting or gouging out that resulted in partly detached, elevated limbs yet careful (if largely invisible) details underneath. Panel 3 at Piedras Negras, dating to Mar. 25, AD 782—a little more than a year before Laxtunich Lintel 1—has the same audacious undercutting (Figure 10). Mayuy's place of origin may account for this daring approach to surfaces, in that he brought with him a technique or practice from his home kingdom. There are no known instances of such undercutting from the greater kingdom of Yaxchilan. This relief made the carving stand out in dim or raking light.




Figure 10*. Undercutting and partial "detachment" of limbs on Laxtunich Lintel 4 and Piedras Negras Panel 3*

Yet there are differences too. Laxtunich Lintels 3 and 4 are rectilinear and taut in overall composition and placement of figures, while Laxtunich Lintels 1 and 2 tend to a pronounced looseness, even drooping, of the figures. Glyphs are more casually picked out in, say, the lines within a **ni** syllable. To be sure, there are notable symmetries in how the four present information. Laxtunich Lintel 4 concerns a mythic scene of opposition of night and day and Laxtunich Lintel 3 has a dynastic accession validation for local rule. Laxtunich Lintel 2 has a fire-drilling on a mythic hole or centipede, described as **ma-ta-wi**, *matawil*(?)—the dry cenote mentioned by Lamb at El Tunel? - and Laxtunich Lintel 1 has a bold display of dynastic might and martial obedience when

captives are presented to the overlord. Here the mythic opposition contrasts deities of wind and water/caves but still commemorate the creation of light-by-fire. The scenes represented on Laxtunich Lintels 1 and 3 may take place at Yaxchilan. These lintels portray the overlord on his throne, which, in the case of Laxtunich Lintel 3, is remarkably close in appearance to an actual bench found in the main plaza of Yaxchilan near Structure 33: Throne 1 (Yaxchilan Altar 16) (see: Tate 1992:fig. 122).

Laxtunich lintels 3 and 4 probably came from one building. They display the same overlord, the king of Yaxchilan, and the same nobleman, Aj Yax Bul K'uk'. This holds equally true for the Laxtunich Lintels 1 and 2, which highlights the king of Yaxchilan but now with a different nobleman, Aj Sak Ma'x. A reasonable guess is that Laxtunich Lintels 1 and 2 also came from one building but of *later* date. This would account for the differences in style between the two sets of lintels yet also fold in the operative hand and style of Mayuy. Whatever the sequence of dates, the two groups of lintels reveal events in the lives of two noblemen under the same overlord. Aj Yax Bul K'uk' came to high office and then, at a later date, impersonated a god with his overlord. A second nobleman, Aj Sak Ma'x, drilled fire with that overlord while a young man, engaged in impersonation as well, and then presented captives as part of his obligations to Shield Jaguar IV.

There are several scenarios here, these lintels came from different structures at Laxtunich itself, each erected by a nobleman, one (Aj Sak Ma'x) succeeding the other (Aj Yax Bul K'uk', Figure 11). The earlier *sajal* had either died or been replaced by the second, yet the second wished to show, through a retroactive scene of fire-drilling as a youth, that he was already in close relation to the overlord. The change in color scheme was systematic; Laxtunich lintels 3 and 4 having a red background, Laxtunich Lintels 1 and 2 a blue. The internal consistency provides added support for the coherence of the two groups. Each pair of lintels required one signature only, hence the uneven dispersion across the four carvings. Doorways equipped with such tags had some special or central position. They resemble the three lintels over the doorway in Str. 1 at Bonampak. Only the middle, Bonampak Lintel 2, has a sculptor's signature. Bonampak Lintels 1 and 3 presumably "share" the same authorship and hence the same signature by default (Mathews 1980:figs.5–7).

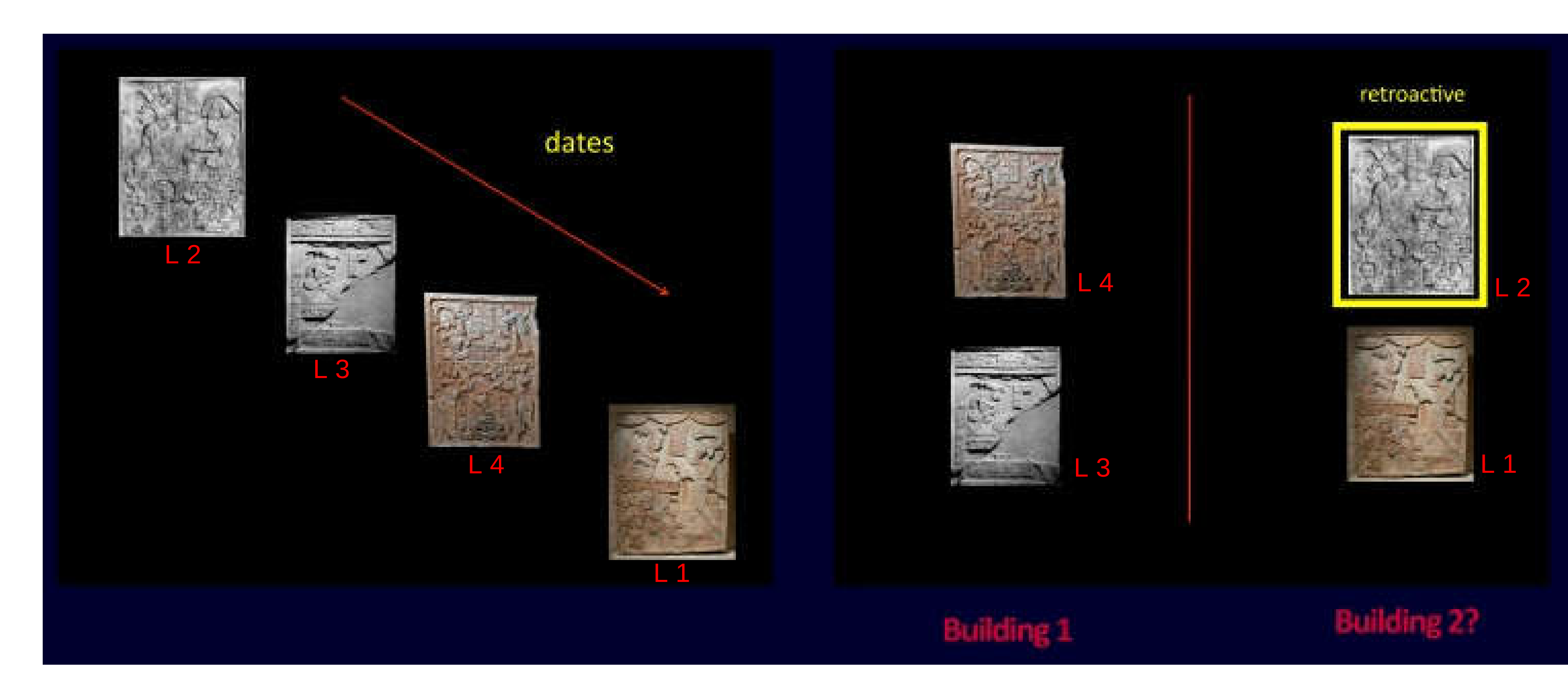


Figure 11. *Comparison between a sequence organized by date and a placement in two buildings.*

Notably, the manner in which Laxtunich Lintel 4 was sawn by looters resembles that of the Laxtunich Lintel 1, a.k.a., the Kimbell carving (Figure 12). The Kimbell has the same vertical cut, just to the side of the ruler of Yaxchilan, and a right, medial cut across the midsection of a figure. The only difference is that, unlike Laxtunich Lintel 1, Laxtunich Lintel 4 already had an angled, natural break. The cuts and saw marks hint that the same people were involved in looting Laxtunich Lintels 3 and 4 and from whatever site or building yielding the later Laxtunich Lintel 1 and 2. And, if the same people, perhaps this occurred at the same place. The extent to which the backs were shaved off can be appreciated on Laxtunich Lintel 1(Figure 13).

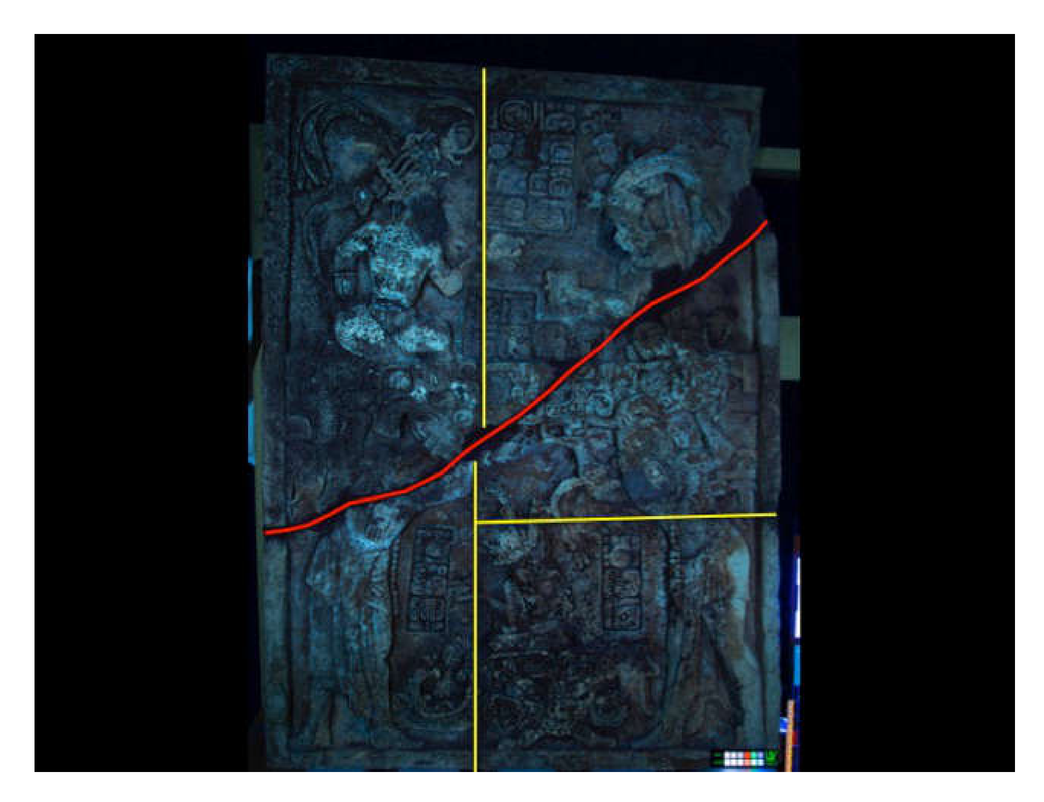


Figure 12. *Cuts by looters in yellow, natural break in red, Laxtunich Lintel 4*

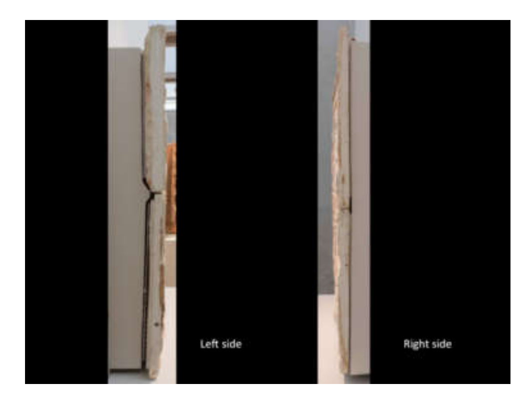


Figure 13. *Left and right sides of the Laxtunich Lintel 1 (Kimbell lintel)*

Laxtunich Lintels 1 and 2 could have derived from a site near Laxtunich but distinct from it, under separate governance by a *sajal*. The historical milieu of the lintels involves a figure named on many carvings at Yaxchilan and in several subordinate sites. He lived almost at the tail end of his dynasty, seemingly the last ruler to be effective and energetic (Figure 14). An attribute on the Mayuy carvings in general is that his regnal name, “Shield Jaguar [IV],” is never mentioned. He is identified solely by his personal name (Chelew Chan K’inich), his guardianship over an important captive, and his Emblem.

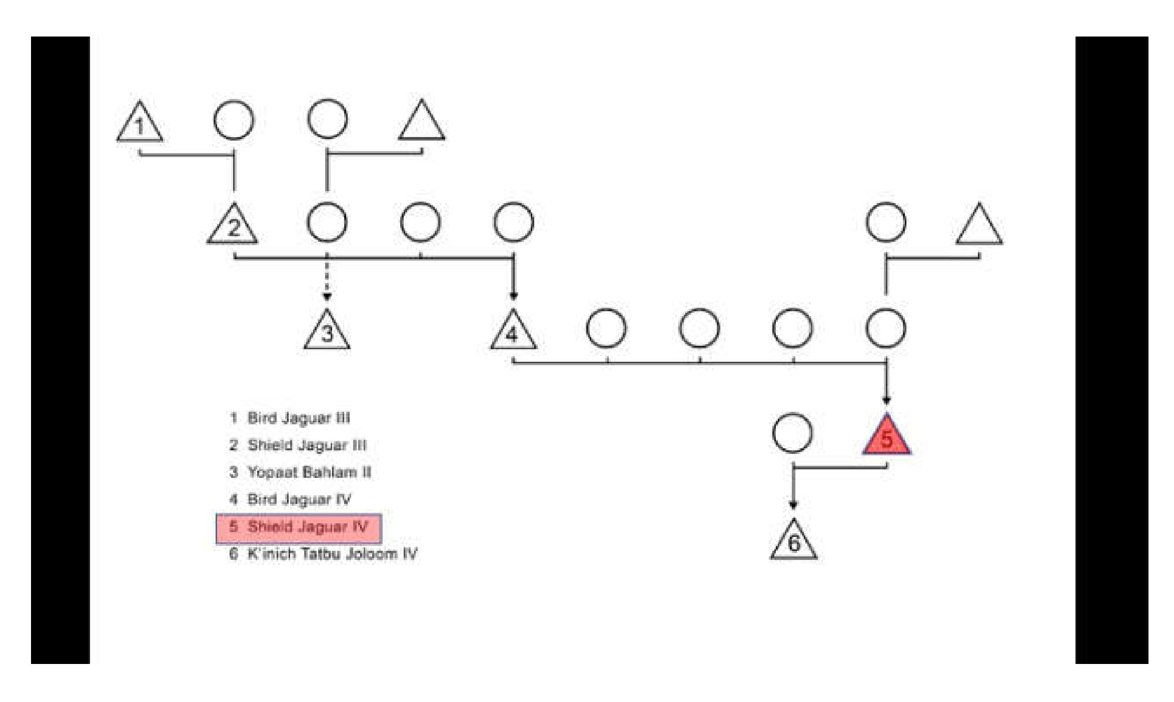
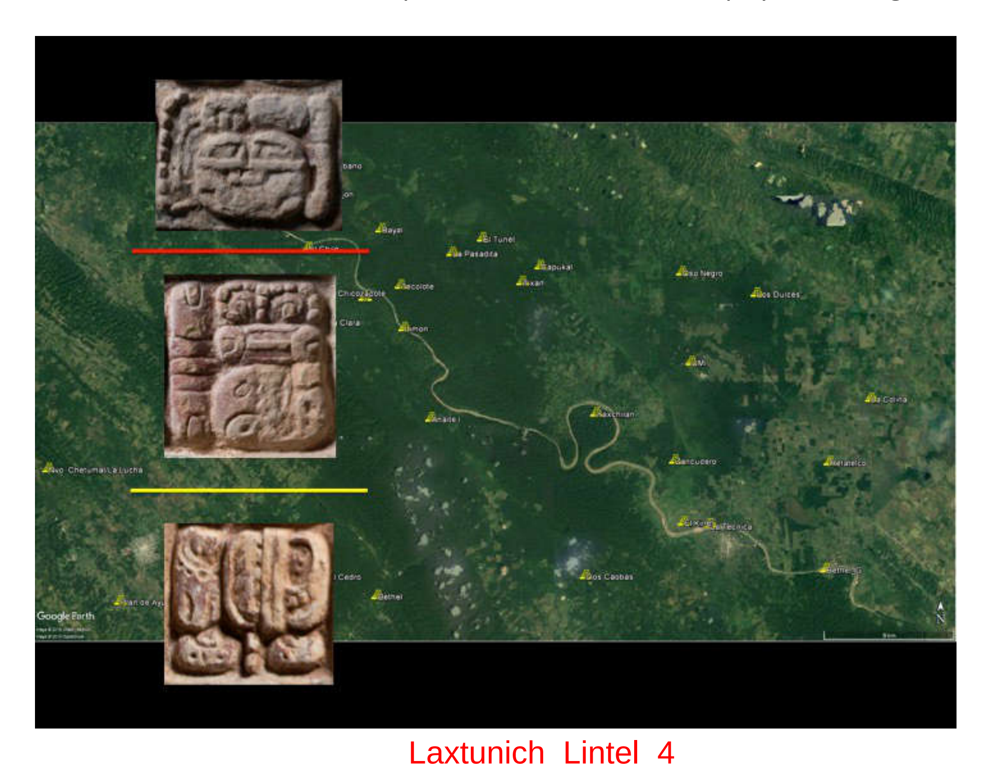


Figure 14. *Final rulers of Yaxchilan, Mexico, with Shield Jaguar IV highlighted (Martin 2014:fig. 136).*

The paleography of his names and other glyphs can be evaluated as well. Mayuy worked variably, flattening glyphs in some cases, or, in the Laxtunich Lintel 4(Fig. 15a) and parts of Lintel 3(Fig. 15b), indulging in rounded surfaces. Later glyphs: Laxtunich Lintel 1(Fig. 15c), Laxtunich Lintel 2 (Fig. 15d) seem to sag, according with the looser handling of his later works. There is also consistency: use of a particular variant of **U**, Emblems with beaded **K'UH[UL]** and no other elements, **K'IN** logograph within the **chi** hand. The largely syllabic spelling of *k'inich* is rare at Yaxchilan and rare to non-existent at Piedras Negras—this is a true idiosyncrasy of Mayuy.

Figure 15. *Paleographic comparison of lintels.*

A final comment can be made about the *oeuvre* of this singularly gifted sculptor. Intrepid in infusing delicate, even vulnerable flourishes on stone, he showed remarkable ability in devising multiple registers within a single image and in arranging complex dispositions of bodies in spatial and social hierarchies. His political landscape must have been complicated too, involving *sajal*, *basajal* ("head *sajal*," on Laxtunich Lintel 4), and, within one monument, an intermediate level (a magnate rank?) of someone labelled as a Chak Tok Wayib (Figure 16, see Beliaev 2004, for discussion of this title). The masterworks of Mayuy looked back to earlier works, modified that legacy, and, towards the end of the Classic period, flourished at the physical margins of a Maya kingdom.



Laxtunich Lintel 4

Figure 16. *Possible hierarchy of nobles and overlords in the kingdom of Yaxchilan.*

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September 4, 2017

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https://decipherment.wordpress.com/2017/09/04/a-universe-in-a-maya-lintel-iv-seasonal-gods-and-cosmic-kings/

A Universe in a Maya Lintel IV: Seasonal Gods and Cosmic Kings

by mayoid • Uncategorized

by **Stephen Houston** (Brown University), **James Doyle** (Metropolitan Museum of Art), **David Stuart** (UT-Austin), and **Karl Taube** (UC-Riverside)

As a form of authority, sacred kingship is both ubiquitous and long-lived. It occurs most everywhere where complex societies exist, and it has endured, until its recent extinction or weakening, for many thousands of years (Oakley 2006:10–11). Yet there are almost as many variants as examples. This is not to deny parallels or traits in common. Typically, sacred rule fuses microcosms (structures at immediate, human scale) with macrocosms (those at vast levels beyond easy comprehension). It also mutes or disguises the vagaries of political life. To make such affairs seem smooth, logical, and predictable, there may be appeals to—or mergers with—eternal cycles, celestial phenomena, and exemplary beings of a supernatural sort. When it comes to kings, what better understanding can there be than *Le Roi Soleil* of France (Burke 1992), or Jayavarman VII of Khmer civilization, smiling out to us as the Buddha of compassion and mercy (Coe 2003:124)?

A checklist of sacred kingship runs a risk, however. It assembles a package of attributes that pulls away, if one is not careful, from what counts: the local meanings, play of personalities, variable emphases, and "shifting contingencies of history" that enliven and trouble human existence (Oakley 2006:18; see also Houston and Stuart 1996). Laxtunich Lintel 4 possesses all of the features of sacred kingship - links to the deities, diurnal or seasonal cycles, celestial or chthonic bodies, the architecture of the cosmos itself - in a granular record of politics and hierarchy. (See above pp 26 - 40 Parts II + III) . Specialists speak of "naturalizing" the ordering of society. Laxtunich Lintel 4 does so at the elite level. Supernatural beings and behaviours slot neatly over and into those of humans. But the greatest novelty is its declaration of self-reference, an illustration, seldom seen in ancient America, of royal construction taking place, and of much else besides: stone that meets sky, day confronting night, season poised against season, royal flesh made divine, and gods brought into human form by ritual impersonation.

Kings, Gods, and Magnates

The composition of Laxtunich Lintel 4 is in some respects like a quincunx, a five-part ordering of distinct elements (Figure 1). In the upper register, two seated figures engage with each other while seated on a stylized "sky-band," a schematic rendering of the heavens as a linear band. That band sprouts a head. Simon Martin (2015:192–196, esp. figures 11, 12), has studied this "cosmic monster of the sky," a crocodilian creature with Venus-sign in his deer ear, and, at the far end, a stylized cache vessel or censer, its marking for *k'in*, "sun, day," painted yellow. Opposed to an "earth monster," a terrestrial counterpart—which does not appear here—the crocodile may have been separated from its opposite at the moment of creation (Martin 2015:194–195). Not a static being, it appears to move along in majestic passage: a text on the Cosmological Throne at Palenque (Palenque Palace Bench) even describes it in terms of *numli ta chan, numli ta kab*, "it passes in the sky, it passes on the earth," apparently across the "back," *paat*, of an important Period Ending (Stuart 2003). Two Atlantean figures, said to aggregated with a set of four (**4-ITZAM-TUUN-ni**), support this mass. Their faces look downwards in steady concentration—this is hard work! In the middle sits an elderly being in profile. Below is a skull with two long bones passing through its orbits and out the palate. Symmetrical vegetation emerges from a cleft just beneath that god. Although subtle, the pattern is clear: there are two figures seated on the sky, two support them, and another, much smaller being hunches more-or-less in the center. Together, they form a quincunx, a common (and ancient) emblem for centrality, fire-making, and cosmic order (Taube 2009:90, 92).

The gathering of figures is at once mythic and human. The most important figure is on the left, not usually a position of honour in Maya imagery (that usually occurs to upper right, Figure 2). Yet this arrangement is well-attested on lintels in the kingdom of Yaxchilan, especially at its subordinate settlements. The local lord often appears to the right, as the main figure of local interest. In seeming compensation, the overlord is depicted in such a way to mark his exalted status. On Laxtunich Lintel 3 and Laxtunich Lintel 1 (Kimbell Art Museum), he sits on the left but at *higher* level, ensconced on a throne that, perhaps, can still be seen at Yaxchilan (see
La Pasadita YAX Area Loot A
below). Laxtunich Lintel 2 represents the overlord in more conventional position, to viewer's right. On Laxtunich Lintel 4 the overlord's superior status is semaphored by his frontal position, one hand on the thigh rather than on the ground—contrast this with the underling's deferential gesture (see Figure 1). The overlord's torso is erect rather than inclined, his handheld glyph higher than his counterpart's. A delicate visual choreography operates here, denoting what is local yet adjusting for relative status. There is little doubt about the person in charge, but local lords discharge key, if supporting, roles in the performance.



Figure 1. *Laxtunich Lintel 4.*

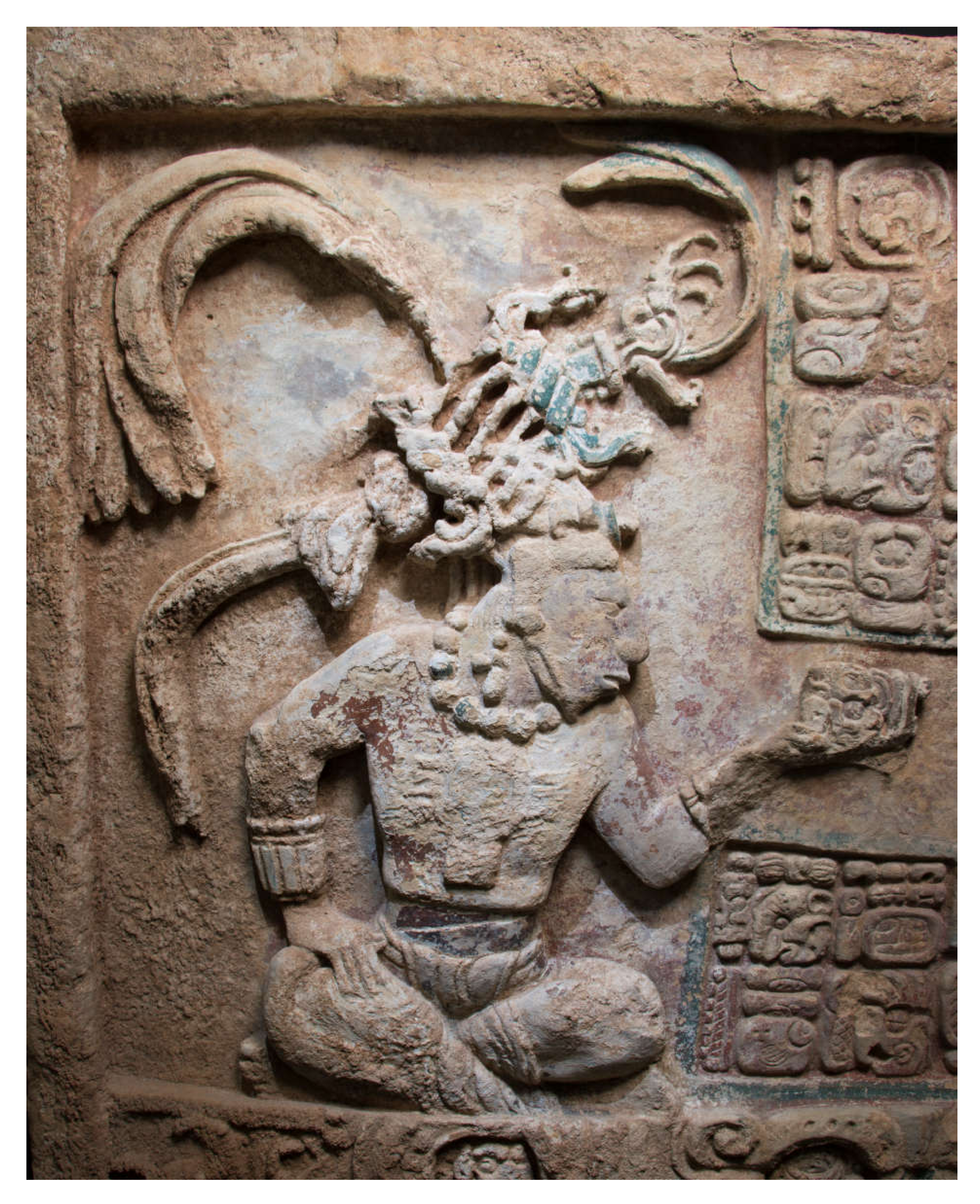


***Figure 2**. Laxtunich Lintel 4, detail, Chelew Chan K'inich [Shield Jaguar IV] of Yaxchilan.*

The main text of Laxtunich Lintel 4 occupies a privileged position between the two figures (Figure 3). It reads:

A1–B1 7 Manik 10 Zip 9.17.2.3.7, March 18, AD 773, Julian Date (Martin and Skidmore 2012, for correlation)

A2–B2 K'AL-[la]ja ti-CHAN K'IN-AJAW-wa, *k'ahlaj ti kan k'in ajaw*, "the Sun Lord is raised in the sky"

A3–B4 U-BAAH[AHN?] K'IN-AJAW-wa che-le wa-CHAN [K'IN]-ni~chi K'UH-PA'-CHAN-AJAW-wa, *u baah ahn? k'in ajaw cheleew chan k'inich k'uhul pa'chan ajaw,* "it is the [impersonated] body/portrait of the Sun God, Cheleew Chan K'inich [Shield Jaguar IV], holy lord of the Split-Sky [Yaxchilan]"

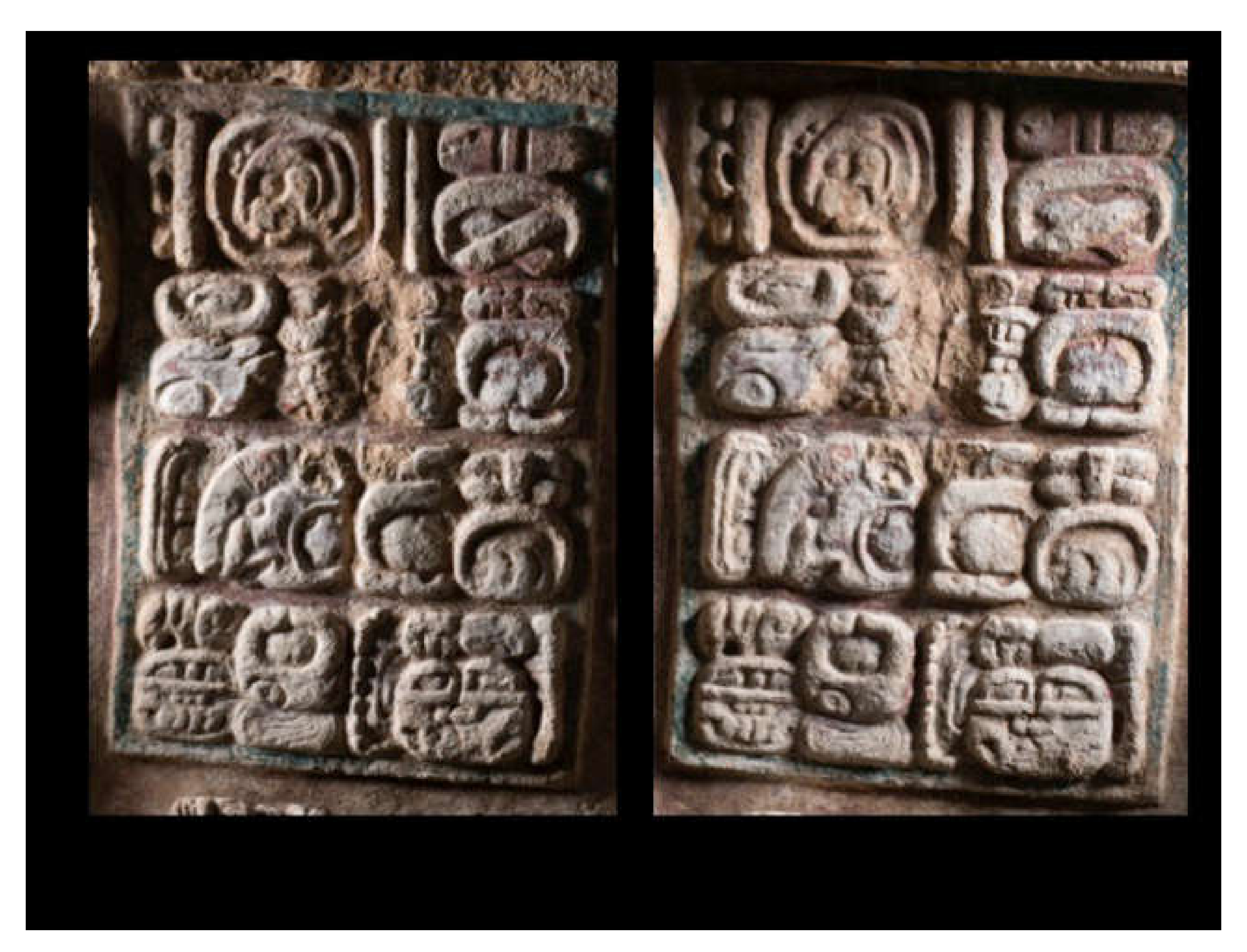


Figure 3. *Laxtunich Lintel 1, glyphs A1–B4, alternative lighting.*

Several things are evident in the text. On this date the Sun God is raised in the sky, a reference to the heavy lifting by subordinates underneath. The text then identifies the ruler of Yaxchilan, Cheleew Chan K'inich [Shield Jaguar IV], who impersonated that deity during this act of

elevation (for impersonation, see Houston and Stuart 1996; further study, Nehammer Knub et al. 2009). Sun God impersonations occur elsewhere in the corpus of Maya texts, most notably with the owners of certain ceramic vessels (Figure 4). In holding up or using such a vase, the owners presumably channelled the identity of a resplendent, eagle-like (*tzikiin*) god. (Some Maya pots were used more selectively and were at least intended for special ritual occasions.)

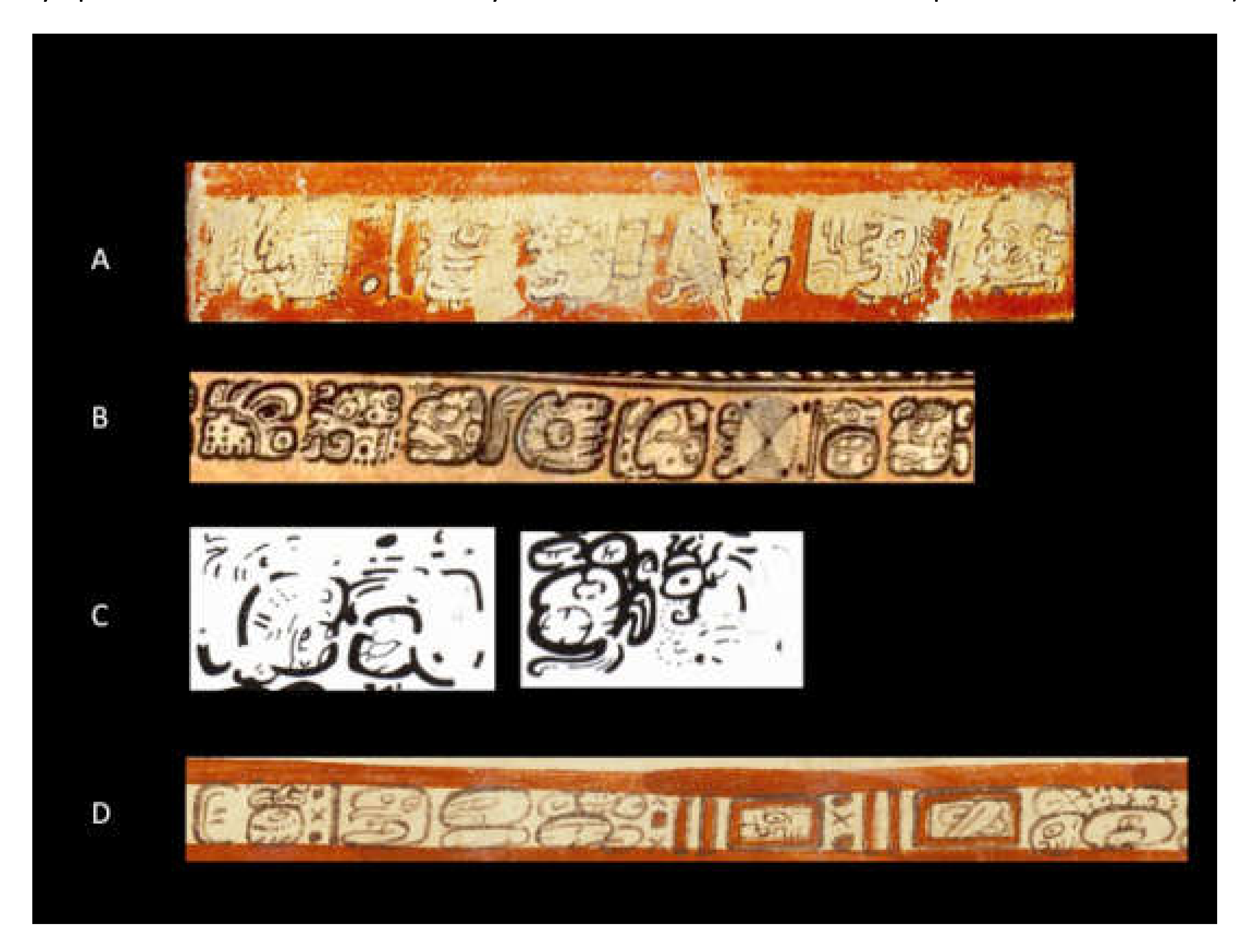


Figure 4. *Impersonation of resplendent, eagle-like Sun God (*Huk Chapaht Tzikiin K'inich Ajaw*):*
(A) *Vase of the Eleven Gods, Naranjo, Guatemala:G1–L1 (K7750);*
(B) *Chama-style vase:J1–R1 (K7224);*
(C) *Bonampak murals, Room 1, Initial Series text:E'1–F'2;*
(D) *late vase with non-Maya glyphs:D1–J1 (K6437).*

Cheleew Chan K'inich's personal name invoked the Sun God, K'inich, so the connection may be somewhat personal. The association does not end there. His headdress has an openwork and angled, even woven, shape with, at front, the extruded head of the centipede. That creature corresponds to the rays of the sun (Boot 1999; Taube 2003). On Copan Stela A, the thirteenth ruler, 18 U Baah K'awiil, dresses as this figure. A text to the side of that image alludes to the impersonation, although further specifying that the flaming or smoking solar disk belongs to a snake—is this some typological understanding of elongated, venomous centipedes (Figure 5)?



Figure 5. *Centipedes and "ribbed" headdresses with Sun God impersonation:*
(A) *Laxtunich Lintel 4;*
(B) *Copan Stela A:B9; and*
(C) *Copan Stela A, top front (drawing by Anne Dowd; Baudez 1994:fig. 2A).*

Chancala Panel X

A similar depiction is found on an unprovenanced stela glimpsed at the Palacio Canton in Mérida, Yucatan (Figure 6). The ruler's body blazes with a **K'IN** sign on the upper arm, and the **AJ-K'IN-AJAW** incised nearby buttresses his identification with the Sun God. On the lord's head is a jawless centipede, and his nose exhales a stylized blast of hot breath. Even his face approximates the **K'IN** glyph by showing the characteristic lobes of that sign. Added information must have been in the upper portion of the stela, in a fragment long since cut off by looters (natural breaks on the bottom suggest the lower section remains in situ).



Chancala Panel X

***Figure 6**. Ruler as Sun God with centipede headdress, ~~AA Palacio Canton Stela~~, ~~Mérida Museum~~*

A final trait deserves comment. The face of Cheleew Chan K'inich has a noteworthy touch, a pointy goatee (Figure 7). Other evidence assigns such facial hair, often yellow, to the Sun God, as can be appreciated in the Postclassic Madrid Codex (Ishihara-Brito and Taube 2012:466; also Taube 1992:50, 52).



Figure 7*. Bearded Sun God, Laxtunich Lintel 4 (lower left); and Madrid 108B (Lee 1985:138).*

The date of Laxtunich Lintel 4 can be probed for other meanings. It lies close to a calculation, contingent on which calendar is used, of March 20, AD 773, close to the vernal or spring equinox. At this point of the year day and night are roughly of the same length, a feature emphasized in the Yukateko expression, "*lahcet kin yetel akab*, "equally/together the sun and night" (Bolles Dictionary). Today, the vernal equinox marks the conventional division between spring and summer. For the Tzotzil Maya of Chamula, Chiapas, the separation goes deeper still. Both fall and spring equinoxes designate times of "rising" and "waning" heat, establishing a line between categorical opposites—dry season vs. rainy season, day vs. night, left hand vs. right hand, and active vs. dormant phases of agriculture (Gossen 1972:30–35, fig. 2). This line also helps configure the path of ritual circuits.

The equinox as moments when resources shift finds an echo among the Cora of Western Mexico, where the sun arrives on March 21 to awaken another god (Nicanori) so that he might

"create all the shellfish and fish and prepare the birds to lay eggs"; another deity, aroused by the forceful light, begins to produce the "salt and other fruits…in the months of April, May, and June" (Mathiowitz 2011:448). At the equinoxes "the rays of the rising sun enter the … [temple] doorway and symbolically climb the stepped altar in his symbolic ascent into the sky" (Mathiowitz 461).

A harvest of feathers marks this occasion as well. It was at the vernal equinox in Paquimé, Mexico, that the scarlet macaws met their end, sacrificed when their plumage was most mature (Mathiowitz 2011:666–667). Further to the north, the Tewa of New Mexico had Summer Chiefs who took charge after the vernal equinox, presiding over the "warm-weather agricultural cycle" (Mathiowitz 2011:918).

In ancient times, equinoxes had more to do with whether the sun rose due east and set due west. Such experiences have been adduced, for example, to explain equinoctial alignments in Structure 1-sub at Dzibilchaltun, Mexico (Coggins 1983:7fn3; Coggins and Drucker 1988). For our purposes, the precise conjuncture is less important than the need of scribes to associate such an occasion with the month day "10 Sip." Marc Zender (personal communication, 2017) reconstructs a similar set of dates on the apparent equipment (casting pendants?) of a calendar or rainmaking priest from Comalcalco, Tabasco, Mexico (he also points out that such notations exist on moulded bricks with Long Count notations). The "10 Sip" combine with a set of day names— Ik', Manik, Eb, Kaban — that served as "year-bearer" or first-of-year dates in the Classic Maya calendar. (Stuart 2004) (P – PARI: PARI0502, pp 1 – 6). The day Kaban in reference to the solstice (Stuart 2015) (David Stuart: 15-12-29, pp 1 – 8).

According to Zender, the "10 Sip" dates at Comalcalco fall exceptionally close to the vernal equinox. To be sure, that observational reality might have been conditioned by the need to join ritually important day signs to a conventionally fixed position in the month. A longstanding affinity exists between "10 Sip" and rainmaking, as in this mention from the Yukateko **Chronicle of Oxkutzcab**:

*"…men at Mani they were, rainbringers at Chichén Itzá then, and there escaped Nahau Veeh, Napot Covoh. On **10 Zip** it took place, in 12 Ahau it was, the tun on 2 Yaxkin, that it may be remembered*"

(Thompson 1927:6–7, using a translation by William E. Gates, emphasis added; Zender kindly provided the reference). One epigraphic proposal entertains a reading of *t'ohxaj* for the verb on the Comalcalco pendants—could this as yet unproven decipherment bear some connection to Yukateko *t'ox*, "divide, distribute," as in a year split seasonally (Davletshin and Bíró 2014:5)?

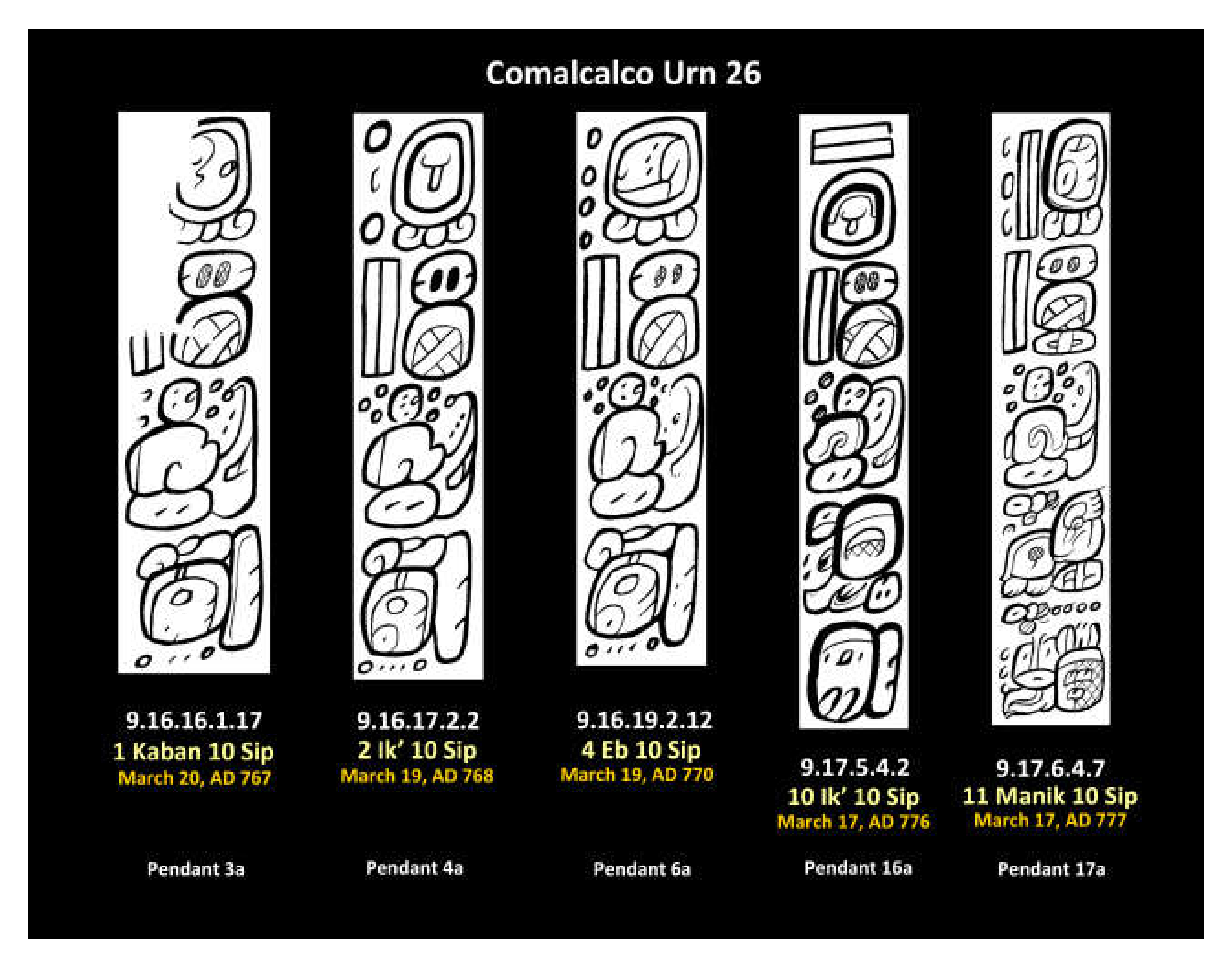


Figure 8. *Equinox dates, Comalcalco Urn 26 Shell Pendants Julian Martin-Skidmore correlation*

What can be understood is this: on Laxtunich Lintel 4 the image of the raised Sun God fit conceptually with the vernal equinox. The sun and, as a god, the Sun shifted to dominance in the heavens. The close congruence with Chamulan belief is, as we shall see, almost unsettling, with its shared emphasis on night and day, the seasons, and agricultural cycles.

Laxtunich Lintel 4 caption of the other figure in the top register (Figure 9). This text reads:

C1 **u-BAAH-hi[AHN?]**, *u baah ahn?*, "it is the impersonation of…"

D1 **1-?-AK'AB-AJAW,** *1-?-ak'ab-ajaw*, "the 1 ? Lord of Night"

C2–D2 **AJ-YAX-bu-lu k'u-K'UK'**, *Aj Yax Bul K'uk'*, name of the nobleman

E1-F1 **sa-ja-la CHAK-to-ko-WAY-bi?**, *sajal chak tok wayib*, the nobleman's two titles

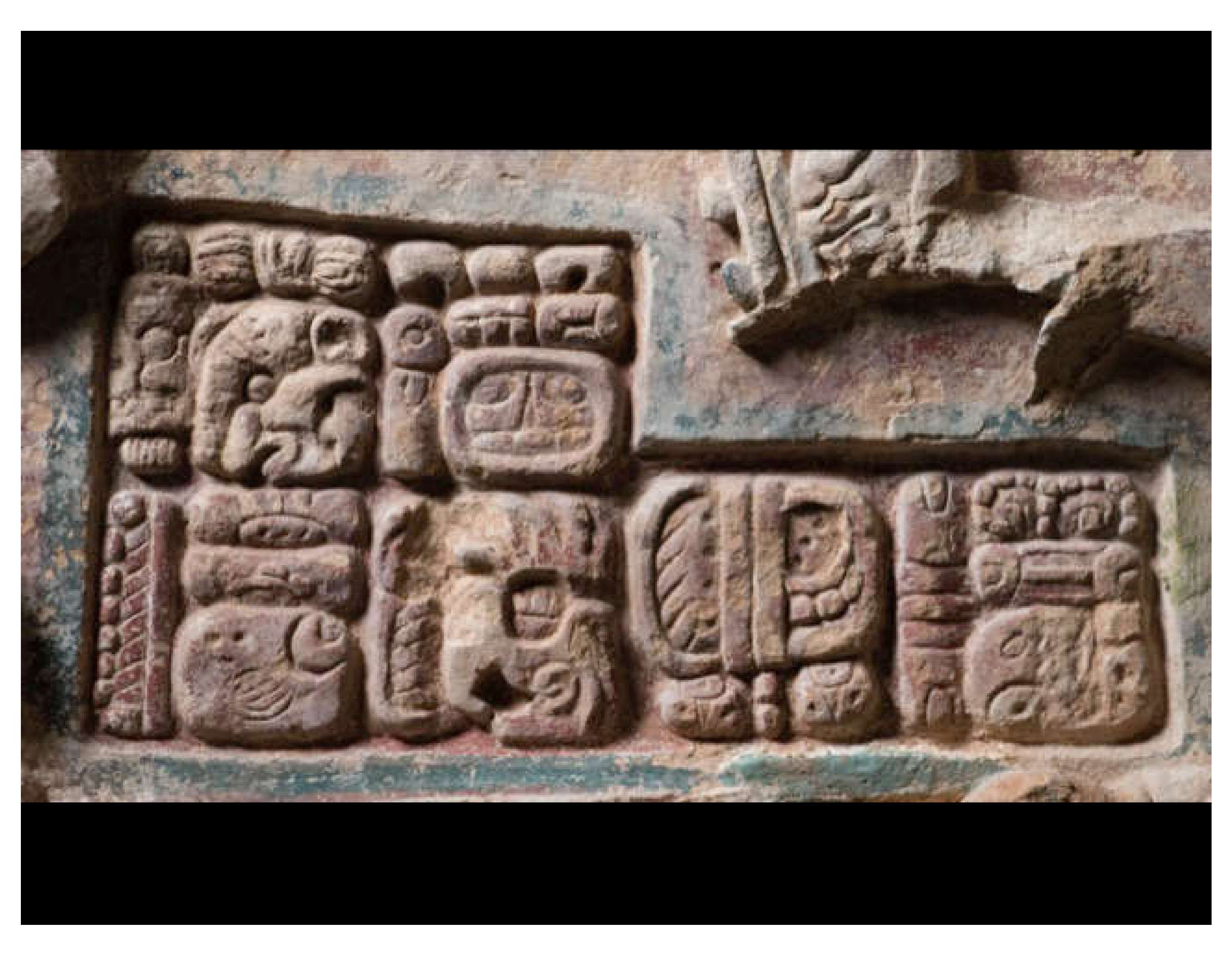


Figure 9. *Laxtunich Lintel 4, glyphs C1–F1.*

The subordinate holds a relatively common title, *sajal*, a term that evades full understanding despite decades of research. The title can be read as to its sound, but there is no consensus on what its constituents mean nor how they relate to noble status. The other is a less usual epithet that may refer to a magnate (Figures 10). Dmitri Beliaev (2004), Alexandre Tokovinine, and Simon Martin have done the most extensive studies of the title. In some areas, as around Holmul, it appears to enjoy great time depth, going into late periods as well. At Tikal, it served as the epithet of an important captive depicted on a large Rock Sculpture in the Maler causeway and on Column Altar 1 from the north side of West Plaza (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:83). The texts of those carvings contain two dates. Perhaps they two stations of display (and pure misery for the captive), at a place to the north of Tikal, along a north-south road, and towards its very center. The prisoner seems to have been captured (*baakwaj*) and then, two days later, sacrificed on Dec. 11, AD 749 (Martin 2003:31–32. Another humiliating depiction tops the undated Tikal Altar 8 (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:fig. 30). For a captive not of highest rank—he carries no Emblem glyph—the Tikal dynasty nonetheless revelled in his discomfiture and downfall. His importance continues to puzzle.

Figure 10. Chak Tok Wayib *title, Tikal Rock Sculpture (left) and Tikal Column Altar 1:B2.*

Turning back to Laxtunich Lintel 4: what is to be made of the god impersonated by the local lord? Text-image correlations offer one lead (Figure 11). The glyphs spell out *ak'ab ajaw*, "lord of the night," which must point to the *ak'ab* element in his panache of feathers. The other objects are more difficult to make out—the volutes resemble smoke/flame, but they also include a puzzling medial loop—yet the glyphs provide assistance here.



Figure 11*. Laxtunich Lintel 4, Glyph of impersonated deity and headdress element of sajal.*

The lord's impersonation spells out an aspect of the Maize God, perhaps read *1 Ixi'm* (Zender 2014:2, fig. 1; n.b, Mayanists sometimes render *ixi'm*, a term for "grain corn," as *ixiim*, but the common use of an internal glottal stop in Highland Mayan languages favours the former, as cued by disharmonic spellings with subfixed **ma** syllable [Kaufman 2003:1034–1035]). A set of substitutions in an entirely different royal name at La Corona, Guatemala, lays out the variants (Figure 12). One example (Figure 12D) "explodes" the sequence of superimposed name glyphs into a fully visible **1-IXI'M CHAK-NAHB-bi CHAN/CHAN[A'N?]** (the final sign, perhaps, from Ch'orti', *a'n*, "elote," or "green ear of corn" [Hull 2016:57]).

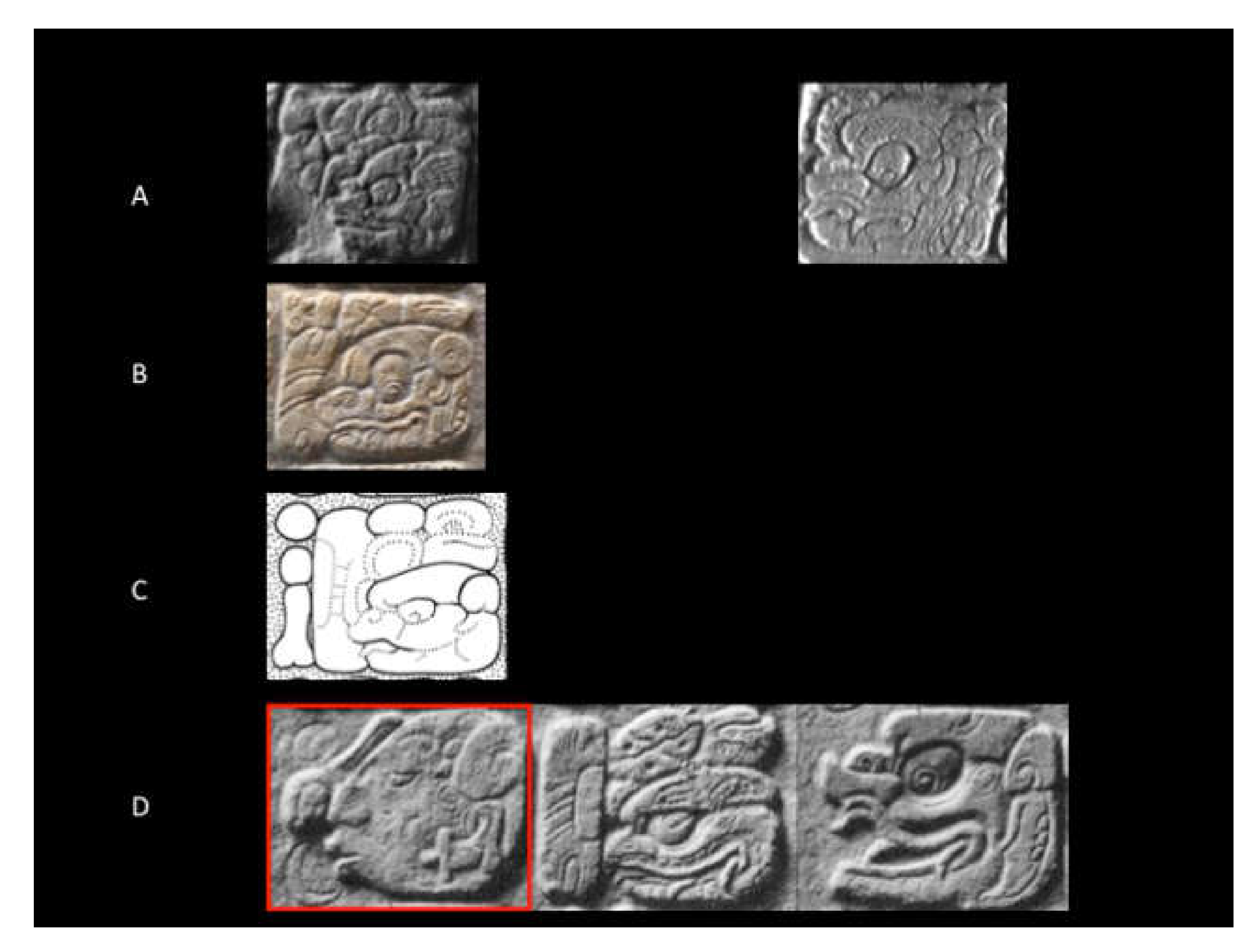


Figure 12. *Chakaw Nahb Chana'n? of La Corona:*
(A) *La Corona Miscellaneous 2:A6–B1; La Corona Element 19*
(B) *La Corona Element 56:pH6;*
(C) *La Corona Element 33:E5;*
(D) *Site Q Panel 1/Grolier:C3–C4; La Corona Panel 3a.*

The abbreviated glyphs exhibit the same locks of hair and jewels as in foreheads of the Maize God (Figure 13).

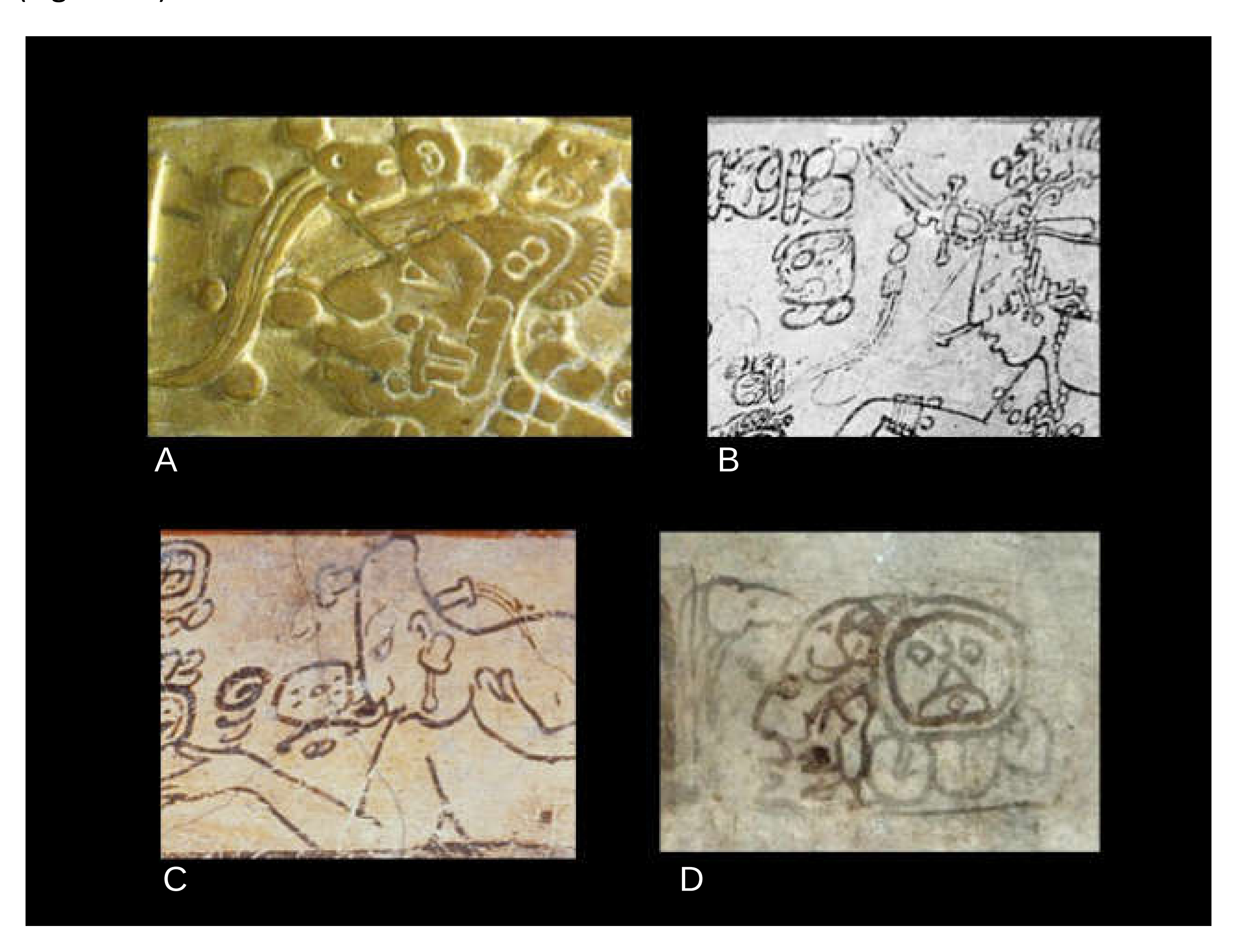


***Figure 13**. Maize god with hair lock and forehead jewels:*
***(A)** Maize god on* AA Kerr 4331 ;
***(B)** Maize god on chocolate pot (K1560);*
***(C)** Maize god on watery journey (K1202);*
(D) 1 Ajaw, *Tikal Group G Paint Text.*

But there is an alternative reading, in that *1 Ixi'm* may simply communicate "one" or *juun*. This possibility receives support from varied spellings for the "Water Lily Serpent" impersonated by some lords and ladies (Figure 14A). The Cuychen Cave Vase from Belize uses the forehead elements for the number "one," and in a context with tight controls for that meaning (Figure 14B; see also Tikal Stela 9:A2, where "two" is recorded with a circle, for "one," plus a circle with pendant [Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:fig. 13a]; see the comparable spelling on Tikal Stela 40:E4). Admittedly, some of the texts at La Corona (Figure 12A, 12B) may show an abbreviation of an abbreviation: a stripped-down *1 Ixi'm* in which the upper part of the jewel has disappeared or been fused with the number.

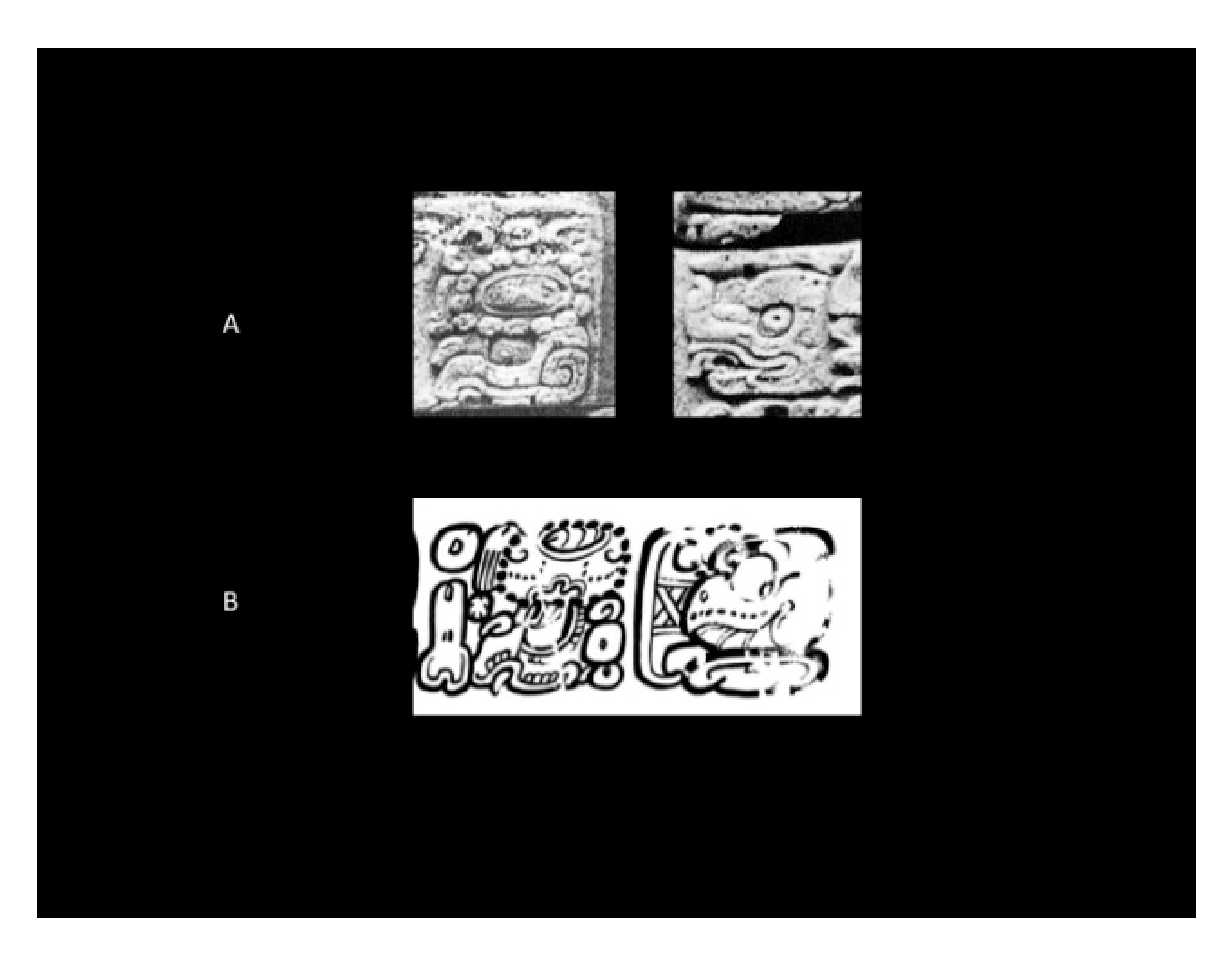


***Figure 14**. Water serpent signs with variants of "1": **(A)** El Peru Stela 34:H1–G2; **(B)** Cuychen Cave Vase:G1–H1.*

A related set of glyphs incorporate a rare prefix, as attached to **TUUN**, "stone," signs in spellings from Tonina, Mexico (Figure 15). That prefix portrays the jewel and forelock of the Maize God, yet they also—this is crucial—refer to stones erected on the dates 1 Ajaw. Are these "Maize God" stones in some metaphoric sense or do they refer to stones elevated on "**1** Ajaw," all on a particular Period Ending in the Maya calendar?

It seems plausible that the impersonation of the lord with Shield Jaguar IV was as the "Maize God Lord of the Night" or, alternatively, as the "1 Lord of the Night." Other inferences ensue. The first is that the Sun God, dominant in real life as the overlord, dominant celestially as the sun that ever stronger at this time of year, and dominant mythically as a potent deity, is opposed on Laxtunich Lintel 4 to a Lord of the Night. The latter was connected in some way to the Maize God or, perhaps, to a number associated with the god. In this text Mayuy may have prefigured Chamulan ideas (among others) by alluding to notional segments of the Maya year: one for the Sun and full dry season, another for the night and a time of growth. The mention on Sakpeten Altar 1 of the "birth" of the sun on the observed winter solstice whispers of other divisions in the Classic Maya year (Stuart 2015). Possibly it was divided into four parts, of which two, the summer solstice and September equinox, have yet to be discerned or clearly mentioned in Maya texts.

Correspondences between political hierarchies and seasonal (and even agricultural) shifts introduce other questions. Why was an overlord linked to seasonal dominance after the vernal equinox? Was this because of the obvious tie between a ruler and the most obtrusive being in the sky? Or did it relate to the timing of Classic wars and skirmishes, when battles, most led by kings, involved people who could be removed from agricultural duties (Martin 2014:Chart 18)? The sector in which Laxtunich was found likely served as the "hamper" of the kingdom, a place producing much of its food (Andrew Scherer, personal communication, 2017). The ritual arrangements on the lintel glimmer with economic ones.

We do know the sun was a preoccupation of the Yaxchilan dynasty. Its rulers expressed great interest in solar movements, especially the summer solstice, with which they aligned buildings like Structure 41 (Tate 1992:95, 240–249). Dances too were celebrated with a distinct rod that scholars call a "flapstaff," one being depicted at La Pasadita, not far from the possible location of Laxtunich (Kamal et al. 1999). As at Dzibilchaltun, perhaps the building that housed the Laxtunich lintels accorded with the vernal equinox and its east-west alignments. Dana Lamb's map hints at such architectural "hierophanies" or celestial orientations, (Aveni et al. 2003).
https://decipherment.wordpress.com/2017/08/25/a-universe-in-a-maya-lintel-i-the-lambs-journey-and-the-lost-city/
As of May 25, 2019, this post is still published See: David Stuart: 17-08-25, pp 1 - 25

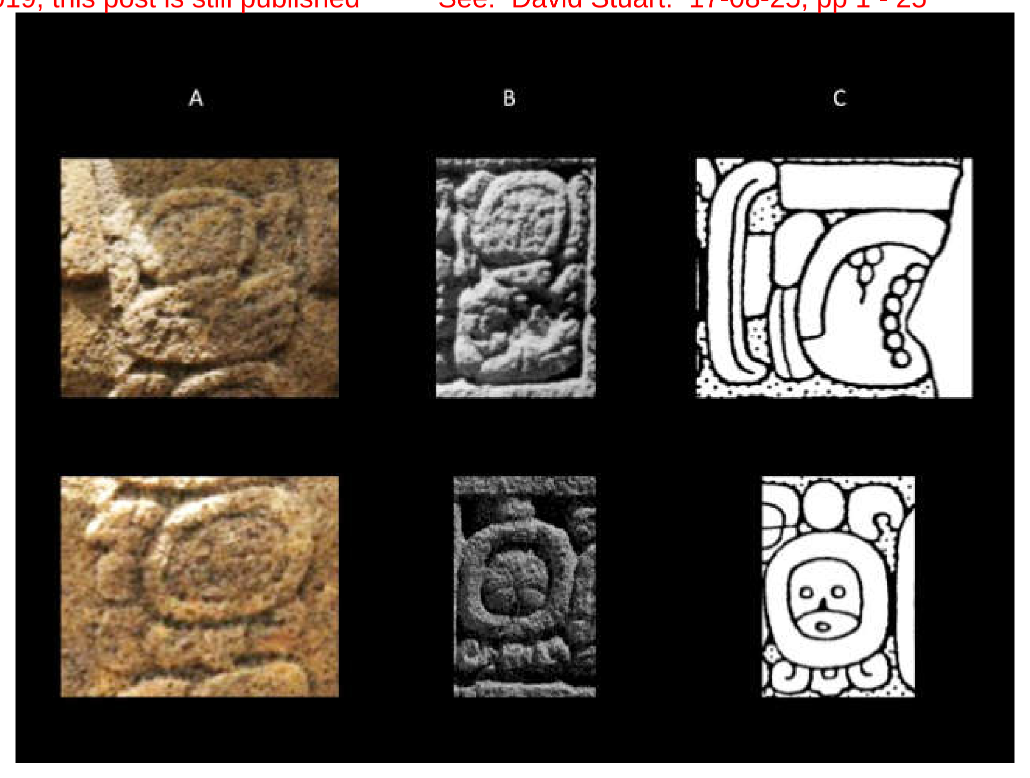


Figure 15. K'al-tuun *expressions with Maize God "forelock":*
(A) *Tonina Monument BUK 1 (9.13.5.0.0* ***1*** *Ahaw 3 Pop;*
(B) *Tonina M145, J1, A1 (9.13.5.0.0* ***1*** *Ajaw 3 Pop);*
(C) *Tonina M134,A8–B8 (9.13.)5.0.0* ***1*** *Ajaw (3 Pop).*

The celestial connotations of the upper register pose one other problem. There is a pairing of two objects held by Shield Jaguar IV/the Sun God and Aj Yax Bul K'uk'/ the God of the Night (Figure 16). The first is a duck-billed wind god (numbered "13" on Laxtunich Lintel 4) as held by Shield Jaguar. The second is a deer head with human footprint over the eye (also with "13"), here lifted by Aj Yax Bul K'uk'. On the Dos Pilas support at the bottom of Figure 16, the Sun God holds the deer head, and at Copan, the wind god merges with what may be a **ju** syllable (an onomatopoeia for an exhalation?). There is a suspicion that this pairing also relates to the seasons, including times of winds or sun, but the meaning flits away from us.

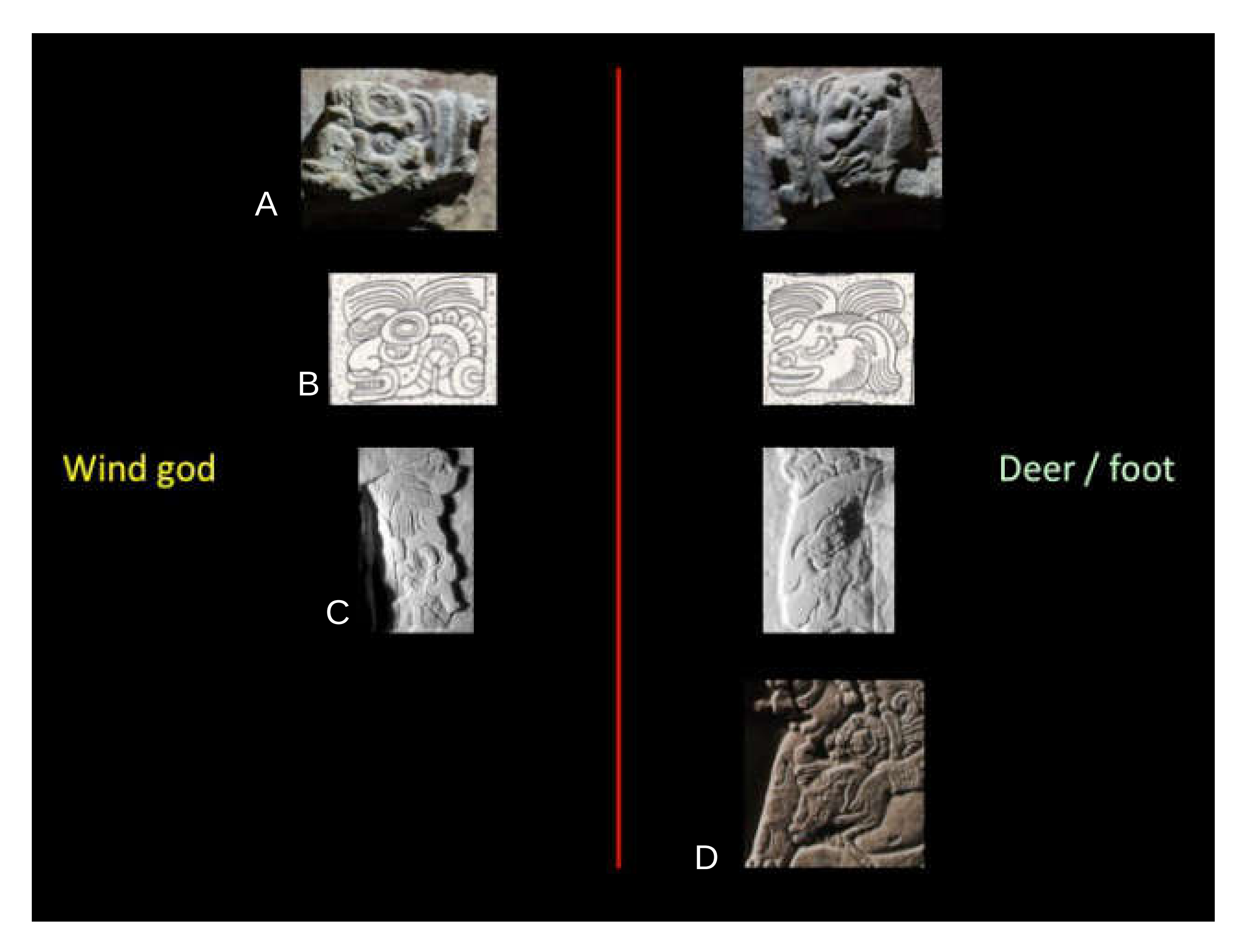


***Figure 16**. Opposition of Wind deity and deer with footprint in eye:*
***(A)** Laxtunich Lintel 4;*
***(B)** Copan Stela 49, pC4–pC4;*
***(C)** Tablet of the Slaves, Palenque;*
***(D)** Dos Pilas Bench 5N Support.*

The Atlantean *Itzam*

Beneath the register with the king of Yaxchilan and lord of Laxtunich are the two Atlanteans (Figure 1). Their titles read **4-ITZAM-TUUN-ni**, the "4 Itzam Stones," indicating that there would have been two more to complement this pair (see above, Stuart 2007, and Martin 2015:205–206, fig. 2, 9). The first employed a name well-stocked with syllabic elements: **mo-yo?-lo-AJAW**, *moyol ajaw* (cf. Ch'orti' *moyor*, "cinched [bag], Hull 2016:287), as well as a relatively high title, **ba-sa-ja-la**, *baah sajal*, the "head *sajal*" (Figure 17). Ordinarily, that title connotes *primus inter pares*, "first among equals." The noble is also an *ajaw*. The paradox is that the figure seated with the Sun God/Shield Jaguar IV—namely, the local lord extolled in the lintels—was merely a *sajal*. The *Chak Tok Wayib* title might have contributed a more exalted touch to his status. But this also suggests that some *sajal* could serve yet other *sajal*, perhaps at the behest of an overlord.



Figure 17. *Laxtunich Lintel 4, Caption by* Itzam *to lower left, G1–G3, with alternative lighting.*

The second Itzam, who wears the same water-lily dress as his companion, uses no *ajaw* or *sajal* title (Figure 18). The caption does record that he captured one **CHAK-u-xi**, *Chak Uux*, in battle (*ux* is a patronymic in Yucatan, but the meaning is uncertain here [Barrera Vásquez 1980:903]). In other words, he was a warrior when not doing the sweaty work of lifting the sky.



***Figure 18**. Laxtunich Lintel 4, Caption of* Itzam *to lower right, H1–H3, with alternative lighting.*

An unprovenanced stela (Laxtunich Stela X) in a private collection (Figure 19), said to be from the "région de l'Usumacinta," contains an identical name at 9.18.5.0.0 4 Ajaw 13 Keh (Sept. 12, AD 795, Julian Date, Stierlin 1998:#215). This cannot be the same person. The dates come too late. But it may have been a namesake or close relative of an enemy taken in war by the Itzam impersonator on Laxtunich Lintel 4. Moreover, and not by chance, the unprovenanced stela (Laxtunich Stela X) has the same basal or toponymic element as the lintel. It portrays almost a vegetal seepage, split in two parts, from a frontal skull and, in the case of the stela, from what may be a stylized seed. Is the place-emblem mythic in either scenes or does it represent an actual location?



***Figure 19**. A shared name and toponym,*
***(A)** Laxtunich Lintel 4;*
***(B)** Unprovenanced Stela (Stierlin 1998:#215).Laxtunich Stela X*

The Itzam have been thoroughly researched elsewhere (Martin 2015; Stuart 2007). Elderly, wizened beings on the whole, they display markings of stone, hard, even indurated bodies, and water-lily headbands, tending also to gather in groups of fours (Figure 20). They do work for others, undertake heavy lifting, offer subservient attendance, hold up day signs as part of cycles of years, and by habit live in watery and chthonic abodes. Typically, they associate with *k'an*, "yellow," the color of ripe corn, symbolic of harvest (see Figure 20, name captions).



Figure 20. *Four* Itzam-tuun*, c. AD 700, Museum of Fine Arts,* [*http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/cylinder-vase-36438*](http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/cylinder-vase-36438)

On a stela at Jaina, Campeche, Mexico (Figure 21), a union takes place between the four stony Itzam and, as the text indicates, the stone itself: **tz'a-pa-ja 4-ITZAM-TUUN-ni**, *tz'ahpaj 4 Itzam Tuun*, "The Four Itzam Tuun are driven [into the ground]," but erected under the supervision of a historical personage. This is more than a depiction, a flat carved surface. It refers to what might be called "lithic immanence," the proposition that spirits reside in stone while doing the work expected of them. In Classic Maya texts, only deities are recorded in this way (e.g., Houston and Stuart 1996:~~304~~ 16, fig. ~~17~~ 12). P - Academia: Divine Rulership, pp 1 - 24

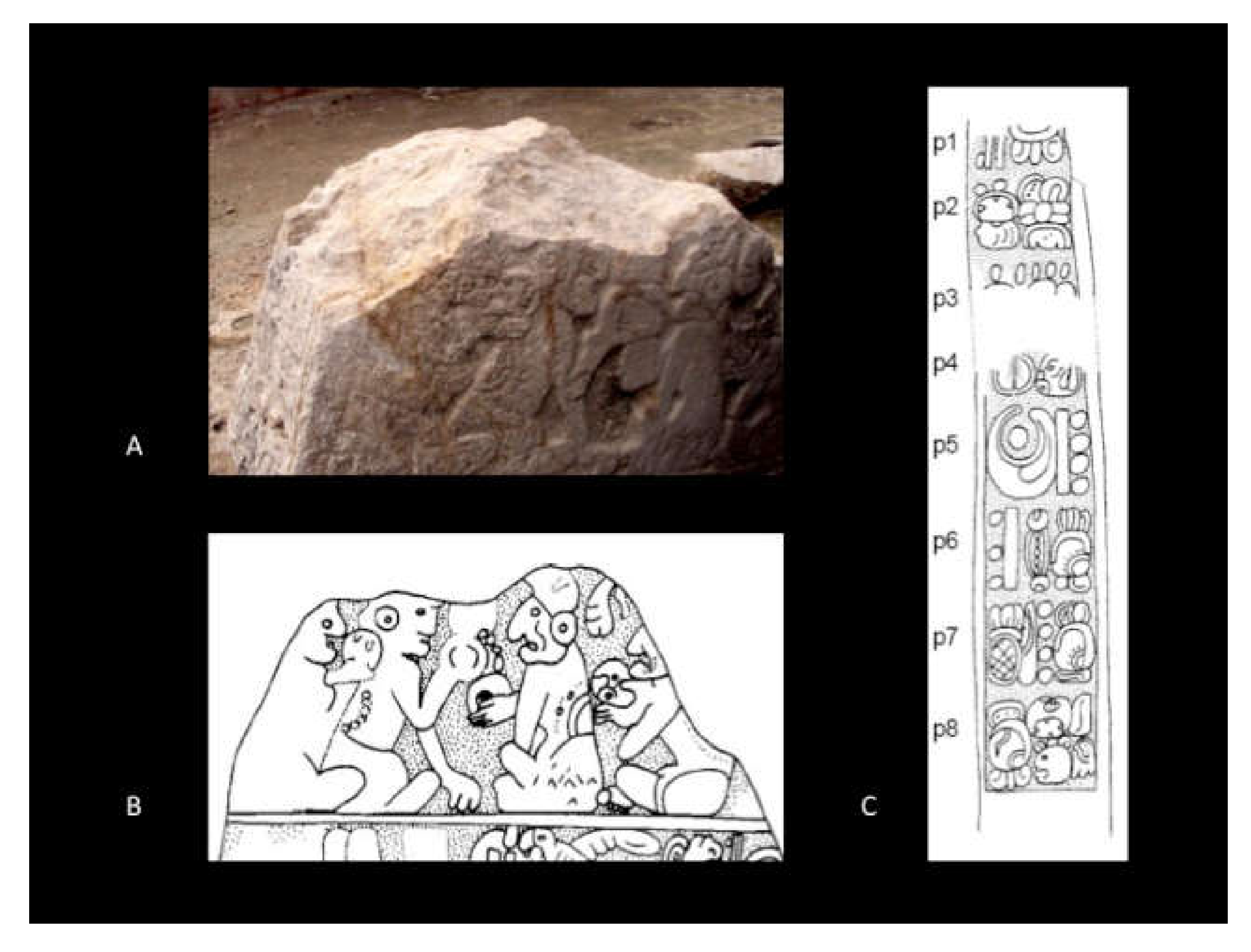


Figure 21. *Jaina Stela 1, 9.11.0.0.0 12 Ajaw 8 Ceh (Oct. 12, AD 652, Julian Date).*

A theme that most closely recalls the Laxtunich Itzam is on a pot of unknown provenance and whereabouts (the photo mosaic with incorrect joins suggests the image was taken some time ago, Figure 22). Two Itzam in an awkward, back-breaking position support a sky throne with a fierce Sun God. The deity's headdress matches that on Laxtunich Lintel 4, a centipede adorns his staff, and what may be a centipede jaw issues from his mid-section to curl towards his back. (The painter seems enamored of that form, repeating it across the image.) A figure with Maize God features and a lunar crescent sits behind the Sun God on another throne. There is no help here from tortured, bleating Itzam, only an angular throne with circular adornos (see the women's throne in Room 3 of the Bonampak murals; Miller and Brittenham 2013:folded insert). The second deity shows indeterminate gender, although the glyph above the crescent may indicate that this is a female. The pair of gods evokes ancestral roundels on the top of stelae at Yaxchilan, one for a father, the other a mother (Houston and Inomata 2009:fig. 7.12). On the pot, the cringing Itzam to the left implies some story not expressed at Laxtunich. He recoils from a fearsome creature rising in front of the Sun God's throne.



Figure 22. *Late Classic vase, unknown location and photographer.*

The final figure in the five-part arrangement on Laxtunich Lintel 4 is dressed as an Itzam, with the same water lily headdress as the noblemen. But the figure has by contrast a more aged, slumped look (Figure 23). The limbs have withered muscles, and, notably, a large head of animate stone merges with his body yet faces in the opposite direction. Such markings do not occur on the more youthful Itzam supporting the sky. His role differs in another respect. In his right hand he holds, not a duck-billed wind god or deer-with-human footprint, but a set of glyphs read **CH'AHB-AK'AB**, if with the same number 13 (the Ch'olan languages make a spelling of *ch'ahb* rather than *ch'ab* more likely; moreover, because of usage in Ch'olan, Houston prefers a meaning closer to "ayuno" or "fast" rather than "creation," a Yukateko gloss [Kaufman and Norman 1984:118]). The meaning of this phrase is opaque—it is mentioned in accounts of creation in the Yukateko *Ritual of the Bacabs* (Bolles 2003:7, 83, 87, 90, 91, 153, 162, among other examples, all passages of utmost obscurity). The same combination of signs appears in offering bowls for bloodletting at Yaxchilan, but without any attached number (Figure 24).

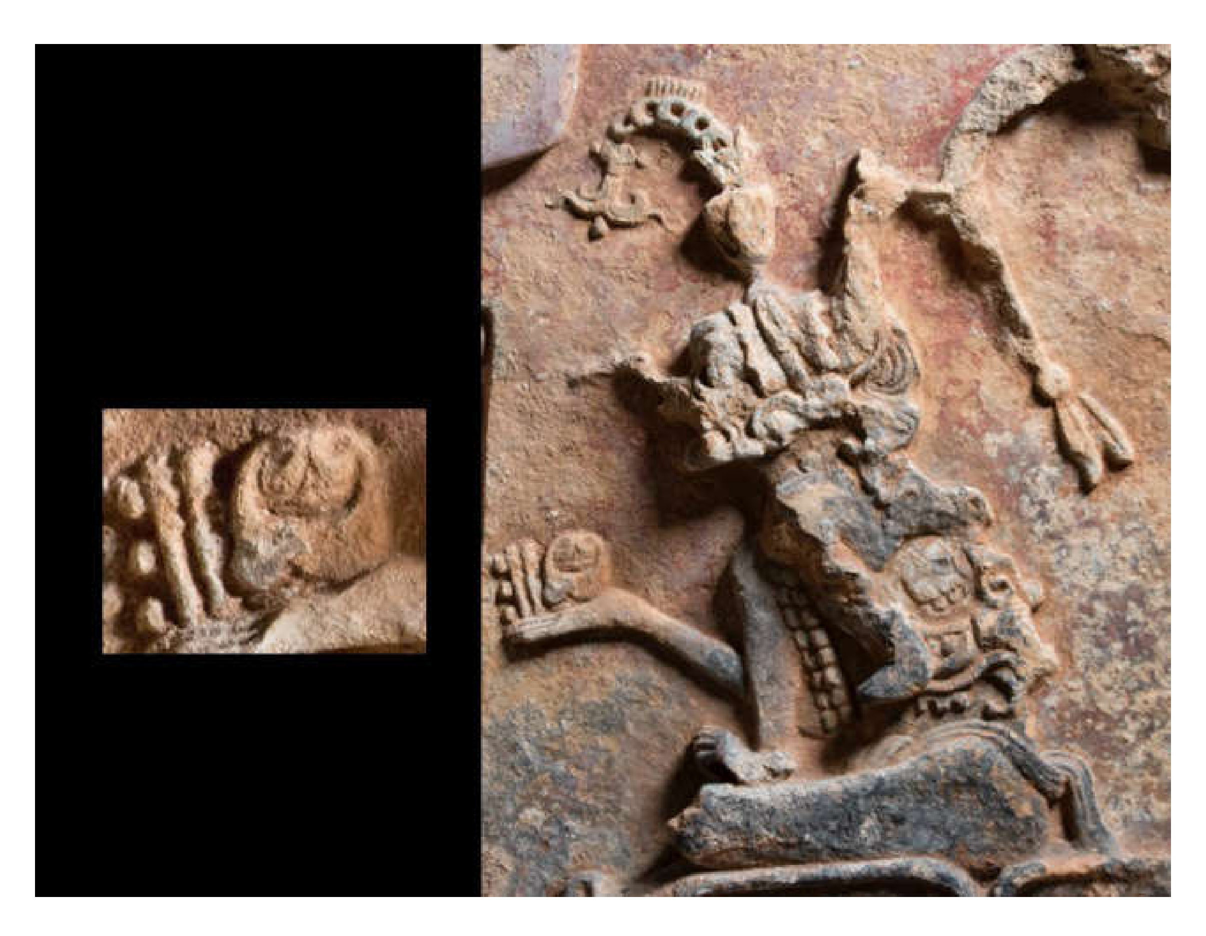


Figure 23*. Laxtunich Lintel 4, Itzam and* 13-Ch’ahb-Ak’ab *sign.*

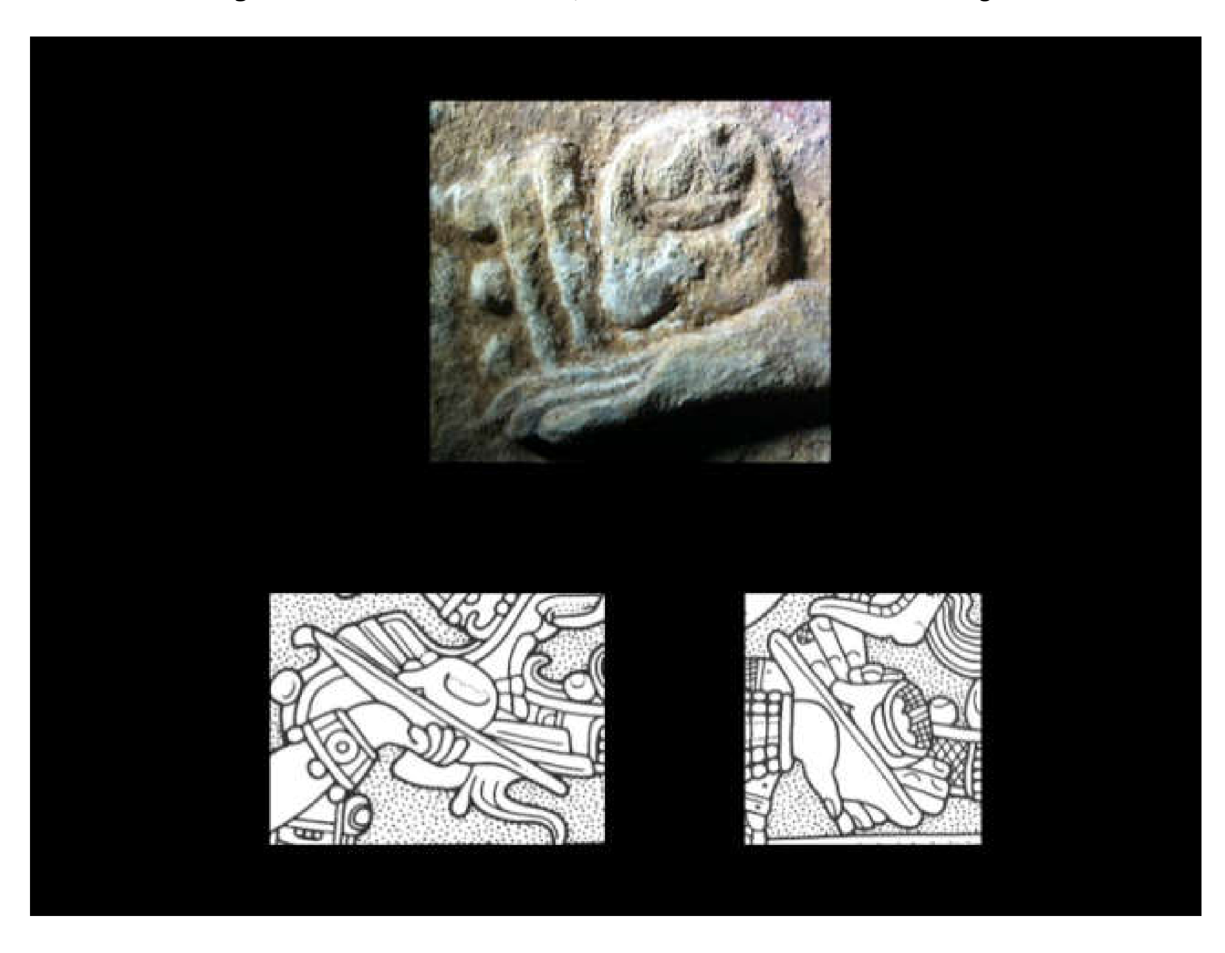


Figure 24*. Comparison between* **CH’AB[AK’AB]** *on;* ***(A)*** *Laxtunich Lintel 4;* ***(B)*** *YAX Lintel 13;* ***(C)*** *YAX Lintel 14.*

The elderly Itzam is unique on the lintel by conveying a purely mythic identity. There is no evidence that he corresponds to an actual historical figure. This may be why he, alone on the lintel, has no glyphic caption. His body is curious in another way. It is the only part of the lintel to be torched, burned or daubed with some far darker material. Lamb's photographs make it clear that this section was one of the first to be exposed—had the figure become an object of devotion by Lacandon Maya visiting the site? (Their "god pots" are mentioned by Lamb at various places in the region.) Or was this some earlier ritual that paid particular attention to the elderly Itzam?

Lifting the Sky, Lifting the Lintel

The two Itzam disclose an intriguing detail. The text leaves the main activity quite explicit, that the Sun God is being "lifted up" (*k'al*) in the sky (Figure 25).



Figure 25*. Lifting the sky on Laxtunich Lintel 4, the celestial crocodile and censer highlighted in yellow.*

Several Maya verbs have a celestial or mythic referent (Houston 2012 David Stuart: 12-07-16, pp 1 - 11). The idea that "lifting" of cultural features—stelae, lintels, royal headbands—could derive from or parallel some celestial action may account for unexplained variants of the **K'AL** sign at Chichen Itza and other sites (Figure 26). The spelling on a lintel of the Las Monjas, Chichen Itza, refers to the raising of a carved lintel (**pa-ka-ba TUUN-ni**) but with a **K'IN** or sun glyph in the hand. Other examples, almost all from the northern part of the Maya area, display star and sky signs, shiny celts, and, in an example on the Altar de Sacrificios Vase, pointed out by Simon Martin (personal communication, 2014), a small figure lifts a polished celt above its Humpty Dumpty head. The raising of the Sun God on the lintel fits these concepts and may have existed as their mythic template or exemplar. Among the Preclassic Maya, most polished celts now lie in caches, disposed in cosmic arrangements (e.g., Aoyama et al. 2017:figs. 7, 8). But part of their existence was above-ground, to be lifted up as central instruments of ritual. Their endpoint was not the totality of their meaning. By the same token, the elevation of lintels, stelae, and pots accrued purpose and warrant in acts of celestial creation and in daily events as miraculous, yet expected, as the rising of the sun.

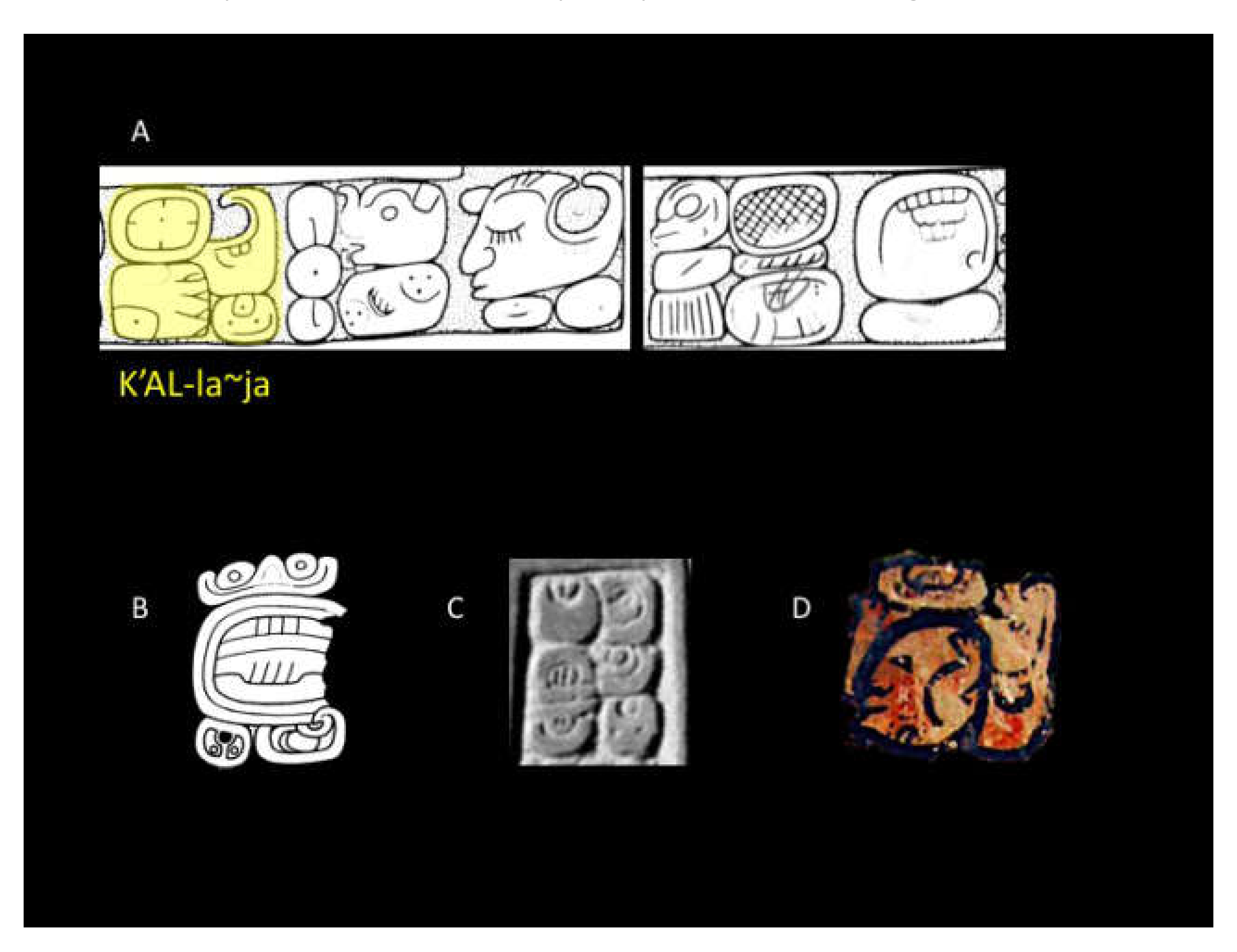


Figure 26**. Celestial versions of* **K'AL** *verb:* ***(A) *raising of lintel carving,* **u-pa-ka-ba TUUN-ni***, Las Monjas Lintel 4:B2–C1;* ***(B)*** *Xcalumkin Column 4:A2;* ***(C)*** *Molded-carved vessel:B1 (K4466);* ***(D)*** *Altar de Sacrificios Vase:E1.*

Another point bears mentioning. The fingers of the two standing Itzam curl around the edges of an animate stone (Figure 27). The image does not just highlight the lifting of the sky, although that must be taking place. A piece of inscribed stone is involved. The image is self-referential, hearkening back to the elevation of a stone, the lintel itself. In a unique visual, the carving depicts how the lintel came into position, yet it laminates that action with a mythic overlay. Mayuy clearly relished his innovative depiction of architectural construction. Indeed, he chose to inscribe his name and titles into the stone's eyes on the lintel within a lintel—like Velázquez or Le Brun inserting themselves into commissioned works. Mayuy, if in name alone, peers towards viewers from the center of the scene, the color of his name glyphs the same as on bodies nearby. That royal and divine vision can validate what it sees—that it reaches out to affect the world—finds a firm basis in Classic Maya thought (Houston et al. 2006:173–175). Mayuy has claimed a prerogative of kings and gods. His is the only presence, aside from the skull below, to address the viewer directly.

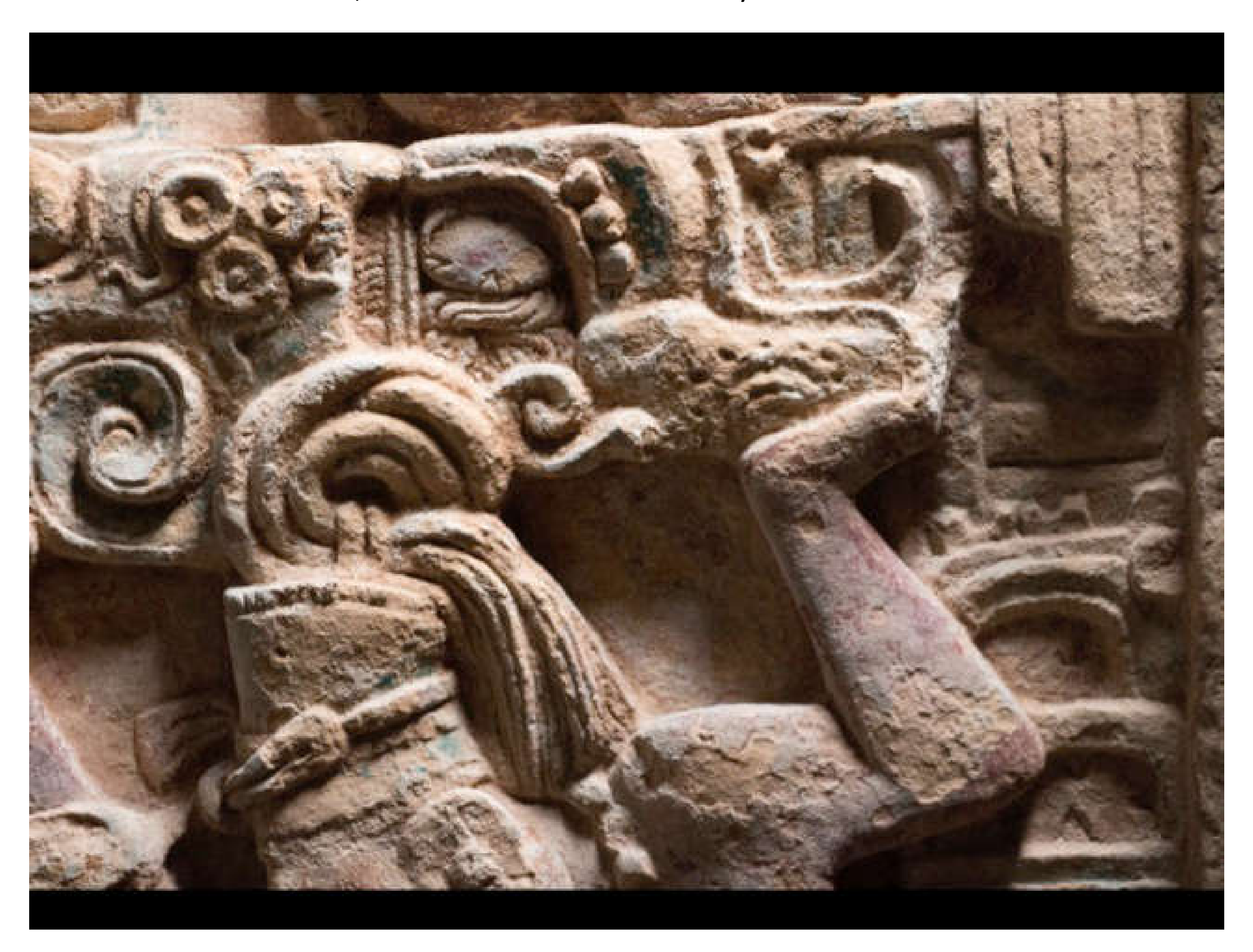


Figure 27. *Close-up, Laxtunich Lintel 4, showing snout of animate stone facing downwards.*

The downward looking snouts provide a compelling clue for the idea that this is a lintel. The language of the inscriptions uses, as an Eastern Ch'olan language, a "causative" for positional verbs. Depending on the stem it qualifies, and the vowel of the stem, that suffix would be, *-bu*, as in "*pak-b'u* [*pak-bu*] 'to place face down'" (Kaufman and Norman 1984:106). *Pak* itself is a term from Common Ch'olan *päk "bend/fold over…face down" (Kaufman and Norman 1984:128). Of relevance here is that, no only is *pak*, "face down," well-attested as a positional verb (a face-down cacao/maize god in Figure 28A), but it functions as part of expressions for the raising or elevation of lintels (Figures 28B, 28C). The lintels illustrated here, both found in areas not far from the probable location of Laxtunich, describe themselves as, "placed-face-down stone," **pa-ka-bu-TUUN**. Laxtunich Lintel 4 thus appears *on* itself. Those elevating the lintel are not the overlord or the local patron, but other nobles tasked with the commission.



Figure 28. *Pak, "face-down," in Maya texts:*

(A) *pa-ka-la-ja, , detail, glyph at E1;* AA Kerr 4331

(B) *['i?]k'a-K'AL-ja u-pa ka-bu TUUN-ni-IL; AA Kansas Lintel*

(C) *k'a-K'AL-ja u-pa-ka-bu-TUUN. AA Po Panel*

Depictions of building and construction are exceedingly rare in the Maya world. Sculpting is shown on a panel found near Palenque, a day or two's walk from the area of Laxtunich (Stuart 1990) (Palenque E. Zapata Panel)—its scene of a lord carving a stone is securely self-referential (Herring 1998). Another appears on Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 2, Step VII (CMHI 3:160). A riser offers, to upper left, a small, abridged version of itself. The Madrid Codex is a source in which images of building abound: **u-ta-k'a u-sa-sa**, "he [the god] plasters his wall" (Figure 29, Houston 1998:358fn16), on other pages, with a sign of unknown value (a Postclassic **PAT**?, see Prager 2013), they appear to shape walls or lift up wooden lintels (Figure 30).



Figure 29. *Madrid pages 14a, 15a (Lee 1985:91, 92).*

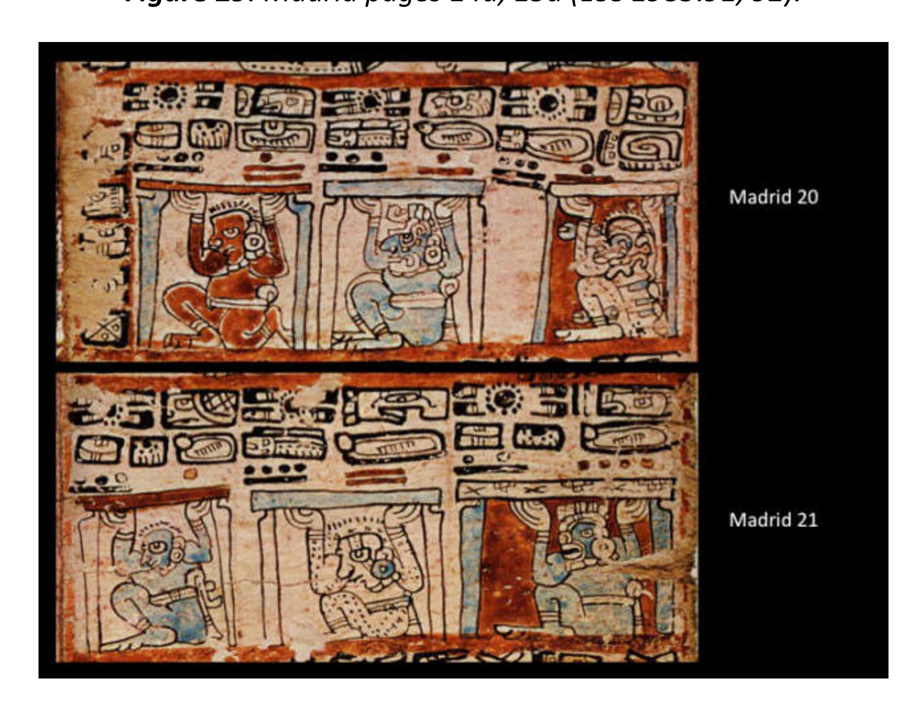


Figure 30. *Madrid pages 20b, 21b (Lee 1985:94, 95).*

In making such images the Maya seem a decided anomaly in Mesoamerica and more broadly in ancient America. Views of building in the sixteenth-century Florentine Codex, delightful for their fresh vignettes and vibrant action, nonetheless stuff the scenes with western buildings and inject them with western practice (Figure 31). Metal adzes, classical pillars, and pediments—the forms could come right out of Renaissance Spain or Italy, and must have graphic antecedents in images (prints?) seen by the painters.



Figure 31. *Images of quarrying, stone-carving, and construction, Florentine Codex, Book X (Medicea Laurenziana Biblioteca, Florence, Book X).*

Ancient Egypt or the inner walls of the Bayon in Angkor Thom, Cambodia. For his tomb, Rekhmire, an important official in the reigns of the Pharaohs Thutmose III and Amenhotep, commissioned a virtual manual of mortar preparation, carving, and building (Figure 32). A more complicated process perplexes scholars who have tried to make sense of building scenes at the Bayon (Figure 33). Pulleys and drilled holes and compression weights helped to rest or affix one stone to another as the great mass of the Bayon rose in the late 12th and early 13th centuries AD. Laxtunich Lintel 4 went them one better by taking such muscular acts, innately collaborative but not of highest prestige, only to appropriate and enlarge them. Aj Yax Bul K'uk' sat with his king, at a time of seasonal shift, but also entered with Shield Jaguar into the guise of timeless beings. Other nobles of the kingdom, were shown as obliging supporters of that dispensation, raising the lintel in an echo of creation.

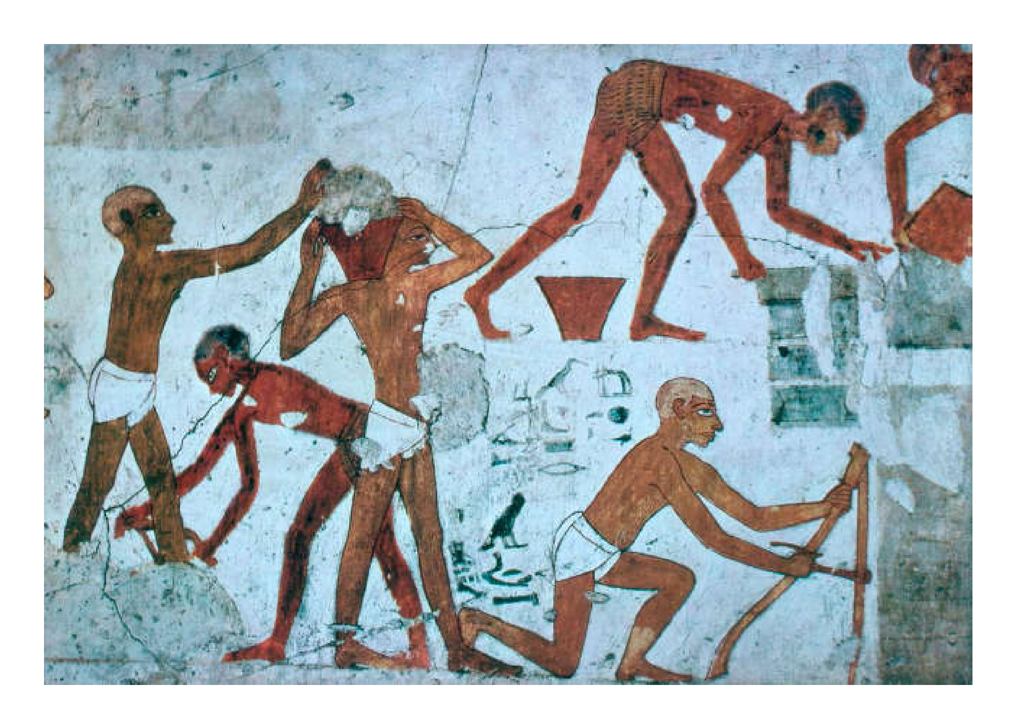


Figure 32*. Rekhmire TT100, Eighteenth Dynasty, New Kingdom, 'Thebes, Egypt.*



Figure 33. *Bayon relief, construction.*

Creation, curiously enough, is a good place to end: the mythic actors and setting of Laxtunich Lintel 4 may not labour in some diffuse past. Rather, they couch their ritual work within a pan-Mesoamerican episode of creation, the lifting of stone, sky, and celestial reptiles out of watery places, perhaps out of primordial floods. The agents of that lifting are Atlanteans, duck-billed Wind Gods of unimaginable strength, as in an illustration from the Postclassic Mixtec Vienna Codex (Figure 34). Laxtunich Lintel 4 anticipates that depiction with its own account of macrocosm mixing with microcosm. Its claims are audacious, its intent self-interested: that seasonal rituals, politically inflected, arise from heroic acts of creation, and that the cosmos itself affirms human hierarchy.



Figure 34. *Vienna Codex, p. 47, the Wind God raises the watery sky (Anders et al. 1992:facsimile).*

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